

Effective Leadership in Tough Times: Three Essays

Essay 1: Governance

By William J. Hook

What will be the effects of the recent economic collapse on theological libraries and their relationships with parent institutions? Much depends on how that relationship has been nurtured and developed in the years prior to the arrival of tough times. For many theological libraries, tough times are just an instance of “*déjà vu*, all over again,” in the immortal words of Yogi Berra. What is perhaps different now, apart from the severity of the downturn, is that we are seeing tough times throughout the institution, and not only in libraries. Even in institutions where libraries have not necessarily been well respected or valued highly, this current, unfamiliar context may provide an opportunity to improve the relationship with the administration.

The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) standards seek to insure that the library director is a member of the faculty, and a part of the curricular and program development processes of the school. This is intended not just to allow the librarian to know what is going on, but to align the mission and goals of the library with those of the institution it serves. If such alignment is not evident to the institutional administrators, the chances that the library will be perceived as a disconnected entity or merely a static warehouse for books increases significantly.

I have described this on many occasions, often to the discomfort of my colleagues, as understanding that the mission of the library is *derivative*. The library’s mission and goals are always dependent upon and derived from the mission, goals, and resources of the institution in which the library exists. While librarians see as self-evident that there are intrinsic values and goods served by libraries, we frequently incorrectly assume that those intrinsic values are shared by our institutional administrators, and are surprised and even distressed when we find that this is not necessarily the case.

The culture of libraries and librarians is imbued with altruism and long-term commitments to the collection, organization, and dissemination of knowledge. Yet each library is a limited and contingent incarnation of the Platonic ideal of a Library. That finite manifestation represented by our facilities imposes limitations on how we develop our collections, on the number of hours we can be open for service, and on the size or modernity of our physical spaces. Those limitations alter over time, with what seems to be increasing frequency—or is it just that we notice the reductions more keenly than we appreciate the growth when funds do increase? What once was an adequate and appropriate collection policy, or what once were suitable hours of service, will need to be revised, perhaps substantially, in our current economic climate.

This is why it is crucial for the librarian to understand fully the mission and priorities of the school(s) that support the library. (For the sake of simplicity I will speak here primarily about single institutional libraries, avoiding the more complex issues and relationships inherent in consortial or multi-institutional libraries.) Understanding those priorities involves more than just familiarity with mission statements and goals stated in strategic plans. It requires close observation of (and participation in) the discussions that inform the decisions and priorities as they are made. Ideally this would include a place at the table at the times when these discussions occur. If the librarian is not given a place at the table, she is well advised to make the effort to read any minutes such meetings generate, or to ask questions of those who were present. Inserting oneself into the process whenever possible, or at least presenting oneself as well-informed about decisions and why they were made, is a wise but often neglected strategy.

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It is in this context that the development of relationships with the institutional administration in prior years can have such a significant impact when money becomes scarce. If the librarian is not seen already as a meaningful and trusted participant in the planning and strategies for the school as a whole, it is unlikely that this perception will change significantly when it comes to making tough decisions. To the extent that the world is seldom a perfect reflection of our intentions (or of ATS principles), the work of the librarian and the library staff frequently involves adaptation to changes after the decisions are made, whether those be changes in programs that the library needs to support, new programs without new funds for collections or staffing, or abrupt reductions in funding. Even so, lean times can be the period in which the library can work to improve its standing within the institution. If the library has not been an active participant in dealing with the tough decisions, creative and responsive changes by the library that are consistent with the overall priorities in the rest of the institution can work to improve the relationship in future (hopefully better) years.

First, it is important to grasp the reasoning behind the priorities and actions of the decision makers in the overall institution. Then, when the librarian proposes reductions in library services, or reviews library priorities in ways that are consistent with these broader actions, her approaches will be viewed as constructive and well-informed. Resisting the temptation to cast the library as a victim, a librarian who proposes realistic changes, and seeks input from the administration will be seen as a valuable conversation partner during times of restraint.

A second principle to be followed in lean times, when budget cuts are necessary, is to avoid trying to keep the effects of cuts invisible. Many times librarians strive to keep services at levels consistent with established expectations, not wishing to disappoint students or faculty. This is a manifestation of the vocational commitment librarians typically espouse, yet such over-reaching does not usually serve the institution in the long run. It can unwittingly serve to validate an administration's perception that resources being cut really weren't needed after all. Allowing the ragged edges to show when resources are cut need not foster a negative attitude. Especially when the entire institution is experiencing tough times, faculty and students usually will be understanding and supportive in the face of reductions. If budget reductions result in shorter hours of service, greater selectivity in book purchases, or longer processing times for interlibrary loan requests, these can be presented in the context of the institution-wide restraints, rather than specific "persecution" of the library.

A third principle is to keep the conversation with provosts or academic deans constantly open, and thus to forestall requests from the administration that are sudden, or otherwise blindside the library. Even in a scenario when materials budgets are reduced, the institution will be looking for some strategic areas in which to foster growth. If funds for library collections are insufficient on a broader scale and cancellations are necessary, ways can often be found to earmark discretionary funds in support of targeted priorities.

One way to effect this is to keep in mind that cutting budgets by the smallest possible amount is not always the best course of action. If subscriptions need to be trimmed, more aggressive cancellations may make it possible to set aside uncommitted funds, which can provide a modest source of flexibility (if only to be able to address any "mistakes" that might have occurred in the cancellation process). The greatest degree of flexibility with collections budgets resides in funds for monographs, while the least freedom is in periodical subscriptions. Careful consideration of canceling some standing orders or moving them to firm orders, ordering titles selectively, etc. are all options to be considered. Reducing firm order allocations from traditional levels and allocating money specifically to be used to respond to faculty requests are other strategies.

All of these proposed options assume a degree of budgetary discretion and control within the library and sufficient trust from the administration to manage these funds. If such budgetary control has not been present in the past, the current economic situation is perhaps the time to propose a plan and negotiate the discretion to manage in this way. It has been my experience that understanding the historical trends of expenditures, and being able and willing to articulate these to administration, can be crucial in maintaining trust that financial resources are being well managed.

Few librarians enter the profession with the intention of becoming accountants. However, effective library management absolutely demands a strong working knowledge of where the money goes and the ability to explain this process to administrators who only very rarely grasp how the library functions. If a librarian is not a skillful financial manager already, there is no better time to learn than in a difficult economic climate. Demonstrating a capacity to manage funds well in lean times gives reason for hope that a librarian will be entrusted with more resources when, in time, the financial climate improves.

FOR FURTHER READING

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Effective Leadership in Tough Times: Three Essays

Essay 2: Human Resources

By Sara J. Myers

A recent series of exchanges on ATLANTIS, a listserv to which many theological librarians contribute, included information about the current employment situation at several seminaries. The staff members at various institutions had been told that there would be no salary increases and, in some cases, cuts in benefits could be expected. Others reported that there were staff cuts and/or hiring freezes even on positions that are critical for basic library operations. The library staff does not seem to be specifically targeted at these institutions, but the conditions are sufficiently dire to raise anxieties and to elicit concerned comments.

Reports from a broader spectrum of society reinforce the seriousness of the employment problem. “The Employment Situation: February 2009” on the website of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the United States Department of Labor stated, “The number of unemployed persons increased by 851,000 to 12.5 million in February, and the unemployment rate rose to 8.1 percent. Over the past 12 months, the number of unemployed persons has increased by about 5.0 million, and the unemployment rate has risen by 3.3 percentage points.”¹

Evidence of the employment crisis specifically in educational institutions also exists. A 2008 survey of presidents who serve in the member schools of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities revealed that “half reported a hiring freeze, and 22 percent froze salaries. Another 42 percent gave smaller than usual salary raises. Eleven percent laid off faculty, and 16 percent laid off nonfaculty. Seven percent cut salaries and benefits.”²

An employment crisis of this magnitude is one that most theological librarians have not experienced previously. Where can they, and, in particular, the library directors who must implement human resources policies and make sometimes painful personnel decisions, look for guidance?

ACCREDITATION AND INSTITUTIONAL GUIDELINES

To begin, we must look at the guidelines that regulate normal operations. The accreditation standards of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada provide a broad outline for library staffing in the section on library and information resources.

The professional and support staff shall be of such number and quality as are needed to provide the necessary services, and commensurate with the size and character of the institution. Professional staff shall possess the skills necessary for information technology, collection development and maintenance, and public service. Insofar as possible, staff shall be appointed with a view toward diversity in race, ethnicity, and gender.³

Furthermore, in its section on institutional resources, the ATS standards state more general goals for human resources within seminaries, including both qualitative goals and procedural expectations. The former are encouraged, but

¹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “The Employment Situation: February 2009,” <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empstat.nr0.htm>.

² Carol Patton, “Opportunity Knocks, How HR is Using the Down Economy to Develop More Efficient Programs and Practices,” *University Business, Solutions for Higher Education Management* (March 2009):19.

³ The Association of Theological Schools, The Commission on Accrediting, *Accreditation Procedures and Standards* (Pittsburgh: ATS, 2007), 16.

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not required. “The theological school should value and seek to enhance the quality of the human lives it touches. . . . The institution should devote adequate time and energy to the processes by which persons are recruited, enabled to participate in the institution, nurtured in their development, and prepared for their various tasks within the institution.”⁴ In more prescriptive language, the standards require that

The theological school shall: (a) engage the numbers and the qualities of human resources needed to implement the programs of the school in keeping with its purpose; (b) develop appropriate personnel policies and procedures to be approved by the board and implemented by the administration; (c) ensure that these policies are clear and adequately published; include reference to job performance evaluation, termination, sexual harassment or misconduct; and conform to applicable requirements mandated by federal, state, or provincial jurisdictions; (d) provide for equitable patterns of compensation; (e) provide clear written job descriptions for all members of the staff; and (f) provide appropriate grievance procedures.⁵

In addition to the standards and policies of accrediting bodies, most institutions provide handbooks issued by the human resources department that cover personnel matters. In fact, there are often handbooks for various categories of employees—faculty, administrators, and staff. Librarians and their roles and status may be covered by all three types of handbooks—directors under the faculty rubric, department heads and other professionals under the administrative category, and paraprofessionals under staff.

Handbooks generally cover a multitude of topics, including (1) the legal framework for employment, such as administrative structure, legitimate reasons for dismissal, hiring guidelines, and conflicts of interest, (2) employee benefits, such as vacation leave, sick leave, holidays, and insurance, (3) institutional privileges, such as attendance at worship, library access, and parking, and, perhaps, (4) policies related to societal issues, such as alcohol and drugs, sexual harassment, and AIDS. While these handbooks are not library-specific, they do guide personnel actions for library staff as well as other employees.

Not surprisingly, most personnel handbooks do not anticipate the sort of conditions that apply during an economic downturn, when employees may be terminated for financial reasons. The sections on dismissal of an employee usually refer to situations in which the staff member has not performed as expected, and is released after being given appropriate warnings and opportunities to improve. However, in a financial crisis, the dismissal of an employee may have nothing to do with job performance.

THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Library directors and others in library management positions face the challenge of converting the theories of accreditation standards and institutional handbooks into daily, work-specific contexts. The following section will cover organizational structure, job descriptions, evaluation procedures, and compensation.

One building block of good personnel relations is an organizational schema, such as a flow chart, that makes clear the administrative reporting lines for all staff. This structure should be reviewed and revised on a regular basis; however, at any point in time it allows staff to see where they fit within the library’s staffing structure. Of course, most libraries also have *informal* organizational patterns as well, which can reinforce, but occasionally hinder, the official structure. While the present author does not advocate unnecessarily rigid lines of authority, supervisory responsibilities are a direct result of the library’s official organizational model, and as such need to be documented.

⁴ Ibid., 21.

⁵ Ibid., 22.

Position descriptions that are accurate and up-to-date for all library jobs are an important requirement for maintaining a good working environment. Often, the occasion of a job opening provides the opportunity to review a description to make sure that it still reflects the needs of the library. The position should be considered in the larger context of overall library staffing and of future expectations regarding library programs and initiatives. When a position becomes vacant, directors can reassess the staff structure to determine if changes might be necessary. The opportunity to reflect about whether a particular position still meets the needs of the institution should be welcomed, given the rapid changes in the library world. Other library staff can be involved in the reassessment process as well, in particular the direct supervisor.

When staff members are hired, the position description forms the basis for future expectations regarding job performance. The description should include the essential duties for which the person will be responsible, the minimal requirements, such as educational qualifications, and special knowledge, skills, or abilities that are needed. Most descriptions also include a statement such as “Other duties as assigned by the director.” These statements should not be thought of as a *carte blanche* for adding additional duties, but reflect the fact that no job description can possibly anticipate everything. They also allow for flexibility to encourage staff initiative and to help staff members develop skills that may not have been evident in the initial hiring process.

For example, a library recently advertised for a copy cataloger and hired a bright, enthusiastic woman who had a master’s degree in library science, although the position did not require that level of education. After she had been working at the library for several months, she mentioned that her specialization in library school had been children’s literature. She had not said anything about that interest during her interview because it was not part of the job description. However, the library had a children’s collection that needed attention. Because of the “other duties” provision, the director, the copy cataloger, and her supervisor worked out an arrangement that allows her to select materials for the children’s library, catalog those books, and offer a children’s reading time each week. Everyone benefits from this sort of flexibility.

Regular employee evaluation procedures are also important components of a positive work situation. Most seminaries expect that their employees, including library staff, will be evaluated on a regular basis, though not all insist upon the practice. Some schools provide standardized forms to be used for staff reviews, although these are rarely library-specific and often include rubrics that do not relate to the library at all. The forms usually include space for narrative assessments in addition to some form of numerical score, in various categories.

A library director at a mid-sized seminary library, who does annual reviews of all the employees who report directly to him, expects those individuals to review their own subordinates in turn. The seminary uses a standardized form for evaluations, and he completes one for each staff member, then asks them to fill one out also as a self-evaluation. They have a formal meeting to discuss both versions of the form, then a final, collaborative version is sent to the seminary’s human resources office. However, the staff member must sign off on the final version, so that he or she is aware of what is in the permanent record.

Such a review provides an opportunity to assess the progress made by the staff person on the goals of the previous year, to re-evaluate the relevance of those goals if necessary, and to set new priorities for the year ahead. The goals should be realistic and attainable, but may also be designed to stretch the employee to achieve higher levels of performance. It may also be a time to review the job description to see if adjustments need to be made to reflect more accurately what is required of the staff member. The director or other reviewer can use the face-to-face meeting to discuss the content of the form and to address issues that the staff member may hesitate to write.

Although theories about linking reviews to compensation vary, in the current economic situation many seminaries are unable to offer any type of salary or benefits increase as an incentive to better performance. Nonetheless, annual reviews should still be conducted to chart the progress of job goals, to offer encouragement and critique, and to form the basis of recommendations in the event that someone applies for a position elsewhere.

The ATS standards require that schools provide for equitable patterns of compensation, and, in the library, those decisions are usually the responsibility of the library director. In fact, in many library budgets, the lines for salaries and benefits account for more than half the total budget. Thus, the library director who manages these lines has a critical fiduciary responsibility, not only to the library staff but also to the institution, to allocate personnel funds in ways that support the goals and mission of the library and the school. In turn, this responsibility works best when it is linked to the overall structure of the staff and to regular review of how each position contributes (or does not contribute) to the larger goals.

HUMAN RESOURCES IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Although the accreditation standards guide overall planning for personnel, a policy statement from the Association entitled “ATS Guidelines for Retrenchment” may seem especially relevant to the economic climate of 2009. The policy was developed in 1976 as advice to schools facing financial exigency. In part as a response to the situation today, the ATS member schools at the biennial meeting in 2008 voted to revise it, with the goal of adopting the revised statement at their meeting in 2010. Many of the guidelines in the earlier version dealt specifically with personnel issues, namely:

- Contract of employment will be honored by all parties and cancelled only on terms on which mutual agreement has been diligently sought. The faculty and administrative staff of the school will explore all possible means of dealing with the financial crisis short of terminating employment of persons whose services are needed and whose qualifications are adequate.
- An institution’s Chief Administrative Officer should lead the community to decisions that (1) balance justice for those with long-time service . . . with justice for those who may have been deprived as minority persons or women . . . and (2) that preserve the new quality of education achieved through pluralism of faculty and staff.
- The community as a whole should do all in its power to discover alternate forms and places of service . . . for those who suffer from reduction in numbers.
- In addition, a theological school may wish to consider one or more of the following options . . . (1) consider dividing available salary resources among staff needed, accepting no increases in salary or accepting reductions in salaries . . . (2) those with adequate financial means may wish to serve as volunteers or as dollar-a-year employees . . . (3) members of a faculty and administrative staff may wish to modify their living standards and their pattern of compensation from the school in order to continue their life and work together.
- The processes used in reduction of staff and the announcement of those reductions with termination of contract should be carried on in a spirit that results in the least damage of the sense of worth of those whose employment is terminated.⁶

⁶ Association of Theological Schools, The Commission on Accrediting, *Policy Statements*. (Pittsburgh: ATS, 2007), 57-58. Available online at <http://www.ats.edu/about/Documents/08ATSPolicyStatements.pdf>.

In general, these guidelines urge seminaries to try to find alternatives to terminating staff, to explore creative financial ways to keep staff employed, and, if all else fails, to make the process of releasing staff as humane as possible.

LIBRARY STAFFING DURING AN ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

In most cases, the financially difficult conditions that impact seminary staffing as a whole will be felt in the library as well. While respecting the need for confidentiality regarding personnel actions and decisions, the more communication that is possible the better.

No one, including library directors, likes to be the proverbial bearer of bad tidings, but in a crisis, the majority of staff members admit that even bad tidings are better than no tidings. If staff members have a part in discussions about the conditions, they will feel more empowered and less at the mercy of “the powers that be.”

The library director needs to be in regular communication with the dean or president and other senior administrators as the personnel plans during an economic downturn are being developed. In part, such communication helps ensure that one department, in this case, the library, will not be the only one affected negatively. The library director needs to make the case for adequate staffing in consultation with other administrators. However, such communication will also enable the director to interpret to the library staff what steps must be taken and what the impact will be.

Communication with the human resources department is also important. HR directors know the state and federal rules and regulations about employment practices, and they know the specific applications for the seminary and the library. They can advise about procedures that must be followed, coordinate retraining opportunities, if that is an option, and help staff search for new positions.

In some cases, library staff positions may be eliminated, perhaps permanently, or there may be a temporary freeze on hiring. Sometimes these positions will be lost through attrition, that is, staff members will take other jobs or retire, and the slot is not refilled. Unfortunately, this can turn out to be a random process that does not take into account the needs of the library. The position someone leaves or from which someone retires may be one that is critical for the operation of the library. Positions that have been “frozen” may be reinstated when the economic situation improves; however, library services and functions can suffer in the interim.

However, in the worst case scenario, library staff members may be terminated because funding is simply no longer available. When this happens, library directors should be prepared not only to work with the school’s HR department, as mentioned above, but also to talk to colleagues about job possibilities elsewhere for staff who are affected. At a minimum, a director should be prepared to write letters of recommendation and to encourage other library staff to be as supportive as possible of those who are going through one of the most stressful times in life that one can experience.

If conditions are less severe, library staff may be asked to take on additional responsibilities or they may be reassigned from the job for which they were hired. In one institution, the library staff member who prepared periodicals to be sent to the bindery took on responsibility for sending all theses to the bindery as well, even though that process had customarily been handled by a different department. Fortunately, it required no additional training for the library staff member. In another instance, a library’s acquisitions budget was reduced significantly, which meant that the full-time acquisitions assistant did not have enough work. She and her supervisor agreed to a reassignment, and

she now assists with cataloging projects. Thinking creatively about responsibilities and being willing to adjust to changing, and challenging, conditions, is essential.

CONCLUSION

Accreditation standards and guidelines, institutional rules and regulations, and library policies and procedures all contribute to a productive and positive human relations environment. The current economic situation, however, means that there is a level of unpredictability and uncertainty that may be impossible to alleviate for the immediate future. The best that a library director may be able to manage is to be clear about what is happening, to be fair in dealing with all staff, and to be as flexible as possible.

Effective Leadership in Tough Times: Three Essays

Essay 3: Finance

By Sharon A. Taylor

We have all heard the horror stories of the wayward economy and its effect on seminaries. President Jim Johnson of Lexington Theological Seminary calls it a “tsunami of economic disasters that we have not seen in our lifetimes.”¹ That seminary is now in a deep retrenchment program, reducing hours for its programs and laying off staff including tenured faculty. Some schools have closed and several others are disbanding programs or not accepting new students into programs until their bottom lines recover. Some of the largest seminaries are dealing with budget deficits in the millions of dollars.

It goes without saying that what affects our institutions affects our libraries. Some of the largest and best-funded seminary libraries are being asked to cut next year’s material budgets by 20 percent or more. Smaller libraries suffer more extreme measures such as eliminating staff positions and book budgets altogether. As my colleague Tim Browning expostulated, “The ham has been cut down to the bone.”² While the current crisis has exacerbated the problem, many libraries have had to face hard decisions long before this latest economic slump. The Association of Theological Schools has been tracking the problem even before the recent Wall Street meltdown and has estimated that up to 20 percent of free-standing seminaries have been running budget deficits for about three years.³

I do not intend to offer here a master list of how to’s when facing financial difficulties. My aim in this essay is to offer some thoughts, questions, policies, and procedures that a seminary library could use when faced with economic hard times. Some strike at the heart of how libraries have been doing things for decades. However, in thinking through the issues I have also come back to what the library is about and what its core vision ought to be. Even in the relatively small pond of seminary libraries, there are distinctive, even exceptional, diversities. We may share some visions and goals, but at the granular level each institution makes its decisions based on several factors: its unique history; its ties to college or university systems; its affiliations with church judicatories, denominations, or particular religious movements; its geographical location; its consortia or affiliation status; the size of its collections and its staff; its academic programs; and the needs of its faculty, students, and other constituencies. There is no one-size-fits-all instruction manual.

Artists know that in crafting a sculpture they deal not only with a form but also with negative space. The shape of the object comes to life as the bits of marble are chipped away, in essence increasing the negative space—or the space around the sculpture. The negative space is as much a part of the art work as the positive space that is the object itself. Used in this context, “negative” is not a pejorative term. I realize that when schools are in survival mode it is difficult to wax philosophical or talk about foundational issues. However, I find the concept of negative space particularly relevant to our libraries. Each library is defined as much as by what services it does not offer or materials it does not own as it is by the positive core of what it does or the collections it has. Or, more to the point, libraries are defined not only by what we spend but by what we decide not to spend. This is true in good times and

¹ Peter Smith, “Lexington Seminary to Cut Staff, Reorganize,” *Lexington Courier-Journal*, January 14, 2009.

² Tim Browning, conversation with the author, April 2009. Browning is head of Technical Services and Lead Cataloger at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and an authority on picturesque southernisms.

³ Jim Warren, “Seminaries Cutting Staff to Save Money,” *Lexington Herald-Leader*, January 15, 2009.

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in bad. On the tough days, however, the negative space often jumps to the foreground, and its potential to shape perception is powerful. If faculty and students hear only what the library is *not* able to buy or the services it can *no longer offer*, the negative space overwhelms the positive object. The public image of the library is skewed, perhaps even broken. Therefore, it helps to view budget control as a positive opportunity—a chance to re-evaluate library functions, to re-conceive what is essential, to re-conceptualize what the library is doing when it spends money. There can be something creative and energizing in employing this line of thinking. It is more than a challenge to do more with what you have; it should also be a challenge to do something entirely different.

BUDGETING

Budget cutting should be a more involved process than trying to decide whether to take nibbles from each line item or larger chunks from two or three. Though it may sound counterintuitive, constricted finances and realigned budgets should actually compel an institution to reveal the vital core of the library. Cutting budgets can also have its humbling side, since one consequence may be to demonstrate that the services or materials that you considered absolutely essential are barely missed. It has always been a revelation to me to browse the ATS/ATLA statistics, comparing the amount of money spent on library staff, materials, and other expenses and the school's total expenditures. For stand-alone seminaries, about 6 percent of the total operating budget has generally been accepted as a wholesome fraction for the library to expect from the institution, and accrediting teams look for this. However, there is no standard wisdom about the division of funds that make up the library's budget. In these times, financial decisions need to start here.

For years we in the sphere of ATS/ATLA have divided the pot into discreet piles and faithfully reported them: professional, non-professional, and student staff salaries; books, periodicals, and AV materials; computer technology; other expenses, etc. By using these very categories, though, we may be inadvertently undermining our library's mission. Perhaps looking at the budget through a different lens would give a fresh perspective on the library's core values and its place within the institution. It might also make creating negative space a little less "negative" or painful. Would it make a difference, say, if our budgets were reorganized into mission statement categories? If the library is to be "a primary educational arm" of the seminary, how much of the budget is aligned by intention with this priority? If our libraries are truly an essential part of the educational process, why is it so difficult to assess our educational costs? If education is an essential part (or *the* essential part?) of what libraries are about today, then should my technical services staff outnumber public services two to one? If the library is "to support the research needs of the faculty," what percentage of the library's budget should be devoted to that support? If the library is "to provide detailed and accurate information about the resources it provides," how much should it cost per item to do this?

One thing I have discovered by beginning to think this way is that most libraries spend much more of their budget on "providing detailed and accurate information about the resources they own" (i.e., cataloging and processing), for example, than they do on other mission categories. In fact some libraries spend as much to catalog and process materials as they do to purchase the materials themselves. Is this the best use of limited funds? Research universities are keenly aware of this question and it has compelled them to reconsider their dependence upon commercial integrated library systems, to rethink acceptable levels of cataloging, and to participate in shared cataloging and metadata projects. It has also spurred the movement to do away with formal cataloging altogether and depend on keywords, tagging, and clouds. As a former cataloger, I am not yet convinced of the efficacy of this move, but as an administrator, I do believe we spend proportionally too much of our budget in this category. What if we adopted

a nominal—or even absurdly low—cost per item for cataloging and processing at an acceptable standard and then tried to find as many ways as possible to reach that goal?

The same kinds of questions need to be asked for every function and service. Is *this* [fill in the blank] necessary for our mission? Is there a better, more efficient, more cost-effective way to accomplish *this* task? Once the budgets are formulated for each mission category, we can be very specific about what will not get done—what services will be limited, what books or periodicals will not be ordered, what databases will be cancelled. And then we can consider how this negative space will affect the core of the library. Is there a way to preserve and even enhance the positive core? Where do you get the most “bang for your buck”? Cutting the entertainment line (this is the first time I have actually had one of these) may seem harmless enough, but the \$500 spent on a classy book signing event for your faculty may be worth ten times that in positive, long-term goodwill for the library. A small digitizing project that allows the library to highlight the school’s history and archival resources may be a public relations triumph that may ultimately be worth much more than continuing a monographic series in a now-peripheral topic to the core collection.

BOOKS AND OTHER MATERIALS

While seminary administrators will acknowledge how important libraries are to the institution, they also admit that one of the first places they think of when cost-cutting discussions arise is the book budget. The benefits of the library collection are often intangible, but the expenses are all too real. As one former dean told me recently, “Library books don’t bleed.” Cutting the materials line might be seen as the most humane way of dealing with a slashed budget; I have done it myself. I have also formulated a few guidelines in thinking about where savings might occur.

Take a look at how the materials line is actually spent. Is 50 percent or more of your books budget tied to standing orders? Perhaps you need to reconsider the librarian’s penchant for monographic standing orders. I am in the midst of overhauling standing orders in my current setting and did the same at my previous library—in one instance to get a better handle on the materials budget, in the other for cost-cutting reasons. Often these series titles are available less expensively elsewhere without the need to purchase every title. Every library does not need every title in a series. Standing orders feed on our quirky librarian natures. Our innate sense of orderliness and completeness (or, as we Presbyterians say, things done “decently and in order”) compels us to start with volume one and fill in all the gaps. But if no one has used a series or asked for a particular title in twenty years, chances are it is not a high-priority item. We found that many series published in Europe are available from U.S. vendors for the same price or even less, and we often save a considerable amount on shipping. At Pittsburgh Seminary we were able to significantly decrease costs for monographic series by ordering individual titles through vendors like Amazon and Eisenbrauns. (We will keep an extremely pared-down standing order list for some annuals and foreign published sets like encyclopedias—things we might lose track of over time).

Set aside your reticence and start shopping for bargains. This is the time to evaluate and possibly change book vendors. At Pittsburgh Seminary we now use four primary vendors for U.S. and other English language titles—each for particular publishers or types of materials. These were selected for the best prices and quick turnaround time but also, just as important, because we get very good service from them. We negotiated for better discounts and free shipping. Several years ago I started using Amazon as a primary vendor. When I moved to my current position, I instituted the practice here as well. While I don’t want to put any library vendor out of business,

Amazon provides great service, quick delivery, and heavily discounted prices for a large percentage of current titles that we order. For some genres—university press titles, or books from small commercial presses—we continue to use traditional library vendors. We also order directly from the publisher for some items, but only if the discounts are significant, and additional shipping costs keep the total costs below what we would get from other vendors—and, most importantly, if the service is good and shipping quick. Saving a few dollars by ordering direct isn't worth it if we have to deal with incomplete or delayed orders or invoice problems.

New is great, but “like new” is great, too. We routinely purchase used copies (in *new* or *like new* condition) of more expensive titles. Amazon, BookFinder, Eisenbrauns, and even Ebay offer considerable bargains for the judicious book buyer. An unmarked book in “very good” condition will match the condition of a new book after it has taken one or two trips through the book return slot and may cost half the price. I have also found considerable savings by buying trade paperbacks rather than purchasing hardbacks for titles likely to receive low use.

It will always help to know exactly what you are *not* buying. If your book budget has been cut, keep a detailed list including costs of what you would have purchased had money been available. Rank each request based on your collection development policy and current need. Don't be tempted to start your next buying cycle buying up all of these items. This will only put you farther behind in collection currency. Allot a percentage of the budget to catch up, but concentrate on keeping current with necessary items as much as possible. Not only does this give you a ready list of vetted titles to order in the future, if and when a windfall comes, but it curbs the tendency to be less reflective and too expansive when money is at hand.

It is always tempting to cut the most expensive items first. However, if these are non-North American and/or foreign language works that happen to be useful to your patrons, then reconsider. A few years from now when the budgets increase, these are almost certainly the titles that will be most difficult to track down. And, patrons are a good deal less likely to purchase such expensive items for their personal use, and more likely to buy less expensive items.

By making these policy and procedural changes in acquisitions, we found we were able to purchase one-third more monographs (almost a thousand books) for the collection between 2007 and 2008, with only a 9 percent increase in budget.

PERIODICALS

What percentage of the materials budget should go to periodicals? For many institutions, this percentage has crept up significantly. At the same time we have already seen shrinking numbers of paper (as distinct from electronic) subscriptions to journals that are peripheral to the core curriculum of the school. A quick survey of periodical subscription statistics reported to ATS over the past five years shows that the vast majority of seminaries have already cut back periodicals in general.⁴ With a handful of exceptions (mainly university-based divinity schools supporting PhD programs), ATS libraries subscribe to fewer periodicals now than they did five years ago. Some show the handiwork of dramatic purges, cuts of 30 percent or even 50 percent. Even so, many libraries continue to spend a third or half of their materials budget on paper subscriptions.

⁴ I arrived at this conclusion by selecting ten college and university-related seminary libraries and twenty free-standing seminary libraries and then comparing the number of periodical subscriptions held. The raw data came from the Statistical Records Report (2001-2002) found in *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 57 (2003), and the Statistical Records Report (2006-2007) found in the *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 62 (2008).

Like Scylla and Charybdis, there are two equally terrifying routes for libraries to steer clear of: canceling paper subscriptions and depending increasingly on online full-text services (and ILL), or cutting out online services and concentrating on preserving the paper copies. The truth is that most of us will try to sail down the middle, doing some of both. Canceling paper subscriptions for essential titles leaves us with the possibility that we will never get copies when better times return. We cannot get around the fact that full-text access in the vast majority of cases means that we are essentially leasing access to a journal. We are at the mercy of the vendor or aggregator who determines not only how much that will cost us but whether that journal will remain in their corral of titles. Even vendors with superb reputations and high vision of preserving information for the academic world cannot guarantee that their titles will be available forever. (Witness the brouhaha last year when the journal *Science* withdrew online availability through JSTOR. A public outcry has now convinced the publisher to rejoin the JSTOR family.)⁵ Many publishers set embargos of one to five years on the most recent issues, so discontinuing the paper subscriptions is not a reasonable cost-saving alternative if currency is essential to your institution. On the other hand, canceling online full-text access strikes at the heart of our service mentality. It is certainly something that my faculty and students want and use. To cancel online access would handicap distance education students and faculty. It also raises a red flag to accrediting agencies to check that appropriate library access for off-campus students and faculty is being addressed. Yet to cancel selectively for a period of a year or two would not drastically jeopardize the core of most libraries. When libraries resubscribe in future years they have not lost anything; they don't have to worry about finding missing volumes.

It is tempting to rank journal subscriptions by cost and lop off the highest priced items. This is acceptable if all the journals in your collection are equal in use and long-term value. Unfortunately, that is rarely the case. For better or worse, reading habits have changed. Many journals in most seminary libraries not serving Ph.D. programs are barely touched. Reevaluating usage, ordering processes and vendor costs is time consuming, and often frustrating, but is also a very useful exercise. I am surprised how many seminary libraries still order each journal title and pay individual invoices. If you are fortunate enough to have free labor, perhaps this makes sense. But for most institutions, the aggregate cost of handling individual invoices is offset by the convenience of a few larger invoices, even with handling charges. We were able to switch to a new periodicals vendor a year ago, reaping some new online claiming benefits and saving enough money to pay for an A-Z list service. (I will say emphatically that switching over a large periodicals list is not a decision to be made lightly or something to be considered frequently.)

TECHNOLOGY

New technology and labor costs rather than the costs of materials have been the driving force for rising expenditures and escalating expectations over the past two decades. At the same time, technological possibilities have significantly upgraded the standards for what is acceptable library practice. While computers were once touted as making our lives easier and routine work less expensive, neither is entirely true. I, for one, never want to return to the days of filing catalog cards. Software has opened up possibilities for doing so much more than we ever could before. It's not just computers and software feeding this appetite for new efficiencies. We now deal with copiers, scanners, microfilm readers with laser printers, laser barcode readers, receipt printers, audiovisual equipment, automated security gates, security cameras, advanced telephone systems, and more. All of these come at a cost beyond the initial purchase price or lease agreement—trained labor to operate, maintenance fees and service

⁵ Lila Guterman, "The Journal 'Science' Rejoins JSTOR," Chronicle of Higher Education News Blog, January 3, 2008, <http://chronicle.com/news/article/3696/the-journal-science-has-rejoined-jstor>.

contracts, and the uneasiness that comes from knowing that most things will be broken or obsolete in a few years. Remember that almost everything is negotiable, especially these days. Bargain for copier leases and maintenance service contracts. In larger metropolitan areas with several competing vendors, this could save hundreds of dollars a month. Cancel maintenance contracts for equipment with few or no moving parts, such as security gates. Many institutions have expensive integrated library systems to maintain. Look into alternative contracts. For some libraries, off-site hosting by the vendor may be significantly less expensive than maintaining the system yourself. The library also circumvents the costs of dedicated computer support staff and capital outlays for new servers.

CONCLUSION

There are a hundred more ideas that will leap to the minds of my colleagues. As a director I spend a considerable amount of time scrutinizing how our money is spent. I evaluate vendor prices regularly. It's part of my job to question everything, even when doing so threatens to drive some of my staff crazy. It is the way that I discover what constitutes the core of my library. If that core changes shape here and there, I would like to know that this is because wise financial decisions made the necessary negative spaces to reveal the form we choose—even when the choices are hard ones.

