

Editor's Welcome: Cuts and a Call to Open Access

Megan Lowe, University of Louisiana at Monroe

By the time this issue of *Codex* 'hits the stands,' so to speak, a new fiscal year will have started for universities and colleges across the state of Louisiana. The inevitable and now-familiar budget cuts will have been handed out ¹, and institutions of higher learning will undoubtedly be attempting to figure out the best way to accommodate those cuts while keeping the negative impacts to their campuses at the minimum². Tuition has been increased at many schools in the state ^{3 4 5 6}; programs have been cut, hiring freezes have been implemented, and a wide variety of cost-saving measures will no doubt be employed ⁷, if they haven't already been put in place.

As many librarians and library staffers know, libraries are a common entity to cut during thin times. Somehow, libraries are considered "fat" – something easily trimmed from the "meat" of the university as a whole. This never fails to confuse and confound me; how can something so crucial to the curricular and research needs, not to mention accreditation requirements, of the institution be treated with such a cavalier attitude? During economically stable times, just about everybody on my campus will strongly support the library and its mission; they will sing the library's praises and talk about how important the library is.

But the minute our backs are against the wall – the minute the word is that budgets will be slashed, and dark times are ahead – all that praise is revealed as so much lip service. Oftentimes, campus administrators are accused of being the worst about the lip service, but it's been my experience that it goes beyond the administrators. Students, faculty, and staff across campus will also suddenly decide that the library doesn't need as

much money and resources as it did before, that the library can “make do” and “do more with less.” The community at large doesn’t take notice, until they find their own access to university library services curtailed.

What disappears from libraries as a result of these cuts? Resources do, in the form of access to scholarly information and people. Journal and database subscriptions are discontinued; no new books are bought. People, faculty and staff, are laid off, or forced to take furlough days. Vacant positions disappear, and the remaining individuals end up wearing many hats. Hours are sometimes reduced. Administration shrugs at us, and tells us to soldier on, like everyone else on campus.

I am not unsympathetic to the cuts on the rest of campus. It’s important, I think, to not lose sight of the fact that other departments – academic programs and business operations and auxiliary services alike – suffer and bleed, too. Administration shrugs at them, too, and tells them to soldier on as well. Faculty and instructors teach extra courses without compensation; they teach overfull classes. Faculty do all of this with the requirements of tenure added to that workload. Instructors do all of this without the protection that tenure can afford them. Staff work long hours trying to maintain quality services to their constituents. Auxiliary service people do the same – working long hours to make sure the campus runs smoothly.

And it’s not just academic libraries suffering – the State Library of Louisiana has lost funding⁸. A library technology program that financed technology resources in public libraries in the state has been eliminated⁹, dramatically impacting rural libraries, even as the state’s administration insists that education (along with healthcare) are priorities – but how can they say that, as they decimate library funding? Don’t libraries play a significant

role in the education process?

Other than either an idealistic (misplaced, don't-hold-your-breath) expectation (hope?) that the state and federal governments would FINALLY appreciate the value of education and INFUSE it with funds rather than depriving it, or a Robin Hood approach to the situation (which I know I'm hardly cut out for, not having archery skills, larceny skills, or a British accent), I'm afraid we are rather stuck in our current position. It is lamentable, and I'm not sure what the solution is. I AM sure it's neither simple nor forthcoming any time soon.

What I do know, however, is that there are ways to make the best of the situation. There are ways to get more resources, even with fewer and dwindling (and even non-existent) monetary resources. This is where the open access movement really shines: it understands the financial (often dire) straits that researchers often find themselves in. It understands that those people who need access don't always have the resources to obtain that access through traditional means. It understands that the value of the information and what researchers can do with that information cannot truly be judged; how does one put a price on making headway developing a cure for Alzheimer's? How does one calculate the monetary value of identifying new ways to teach students? Can we really quantify the worth of exploring any discipline which helps us understand ourselves and the world around us better, which helps us improve ourselves and the world around us? I don't think we can.

Undoubtedly, of course, I may be accused of bias in all this: I'm an academic librarian who also runs an open access journal. So it's a rightful accusation, and a legitimate bias. But I'm also on the frontlines – I'm in the trenches. I see, and feel,

firsthand, the effects of budget cuts. I see the benefits of open access resources. And I firmly believe in the open access movement and what it means, what it represents. It means more than just free, quality information; it also represents collaboration. It is a clear example of “necessity is the mother of invention.” It’s non-traditional, to be sure, but perhaps that’s exactly what we need! Unfortunately, OA journals haven’t quite yet gained the widespread credibility they need in order to be considered legitimate resources, which makes most teaching faculty and administrators look askance at them.

Therefore, in order for OA journals to gain that credibility that will put them on equal footing with traditional journals, they need YOUR content. They need YOUR support. They need YOU. Several major publishing vendors already index open access journals – *Codex* is currently indexed by Ebsco and is offered through their holdings, as are many other OA journals – which also lends OAJs credibility. We need to make teaching faculty and administration aware of OA journals. We need to educate and encourage teaching faculty with regard to OA journals. We need to collaborate with them in order to educate and encourage students about OA journals. We need to get the administrations on the OA train.

Let me be clear, though: I don’t think OA journals will solve our budget problems. But I think they can certainly help us through these hard times, and we’d do well to explore other alternatives in saving money and getting creative with ‘making do’, in order to survive these dark times.

¹Michelle Millhollon, "New La. Budget Now in Motion," *The Advocate*, July 6, 2012, accessed July 6, 2012, <http://theadvocate.com/news/3226547-123/new-la-budget-now-in>.

² WWLTV, "SLU Struggles with Mounting Budget Cuts," last modified June 29, 2012, accessed June 28, 2012. <http://www.wwltv.com/news/Four-years-of-cuts-leave-SLUs-budget-at-nearly-half-of-what-it-was-160768265.html>.

³ Editorial Staff, NOLA.com, "Keep Louisiana's GRAD Act on Track: An Editorial," last modified June 28, 2012, accessed June 28, 2012. <http://www.nola.com/opinions/index.ssf/2012/06>.

⁴ Editorial Staff, NOLA.com, "Southern University Approves 10 Percent Tuition Increase," last modified June 30, 2012, accessed July 2, 2012. http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2012/06/southern_university_approves_1.html.

⁵ Koran Addo, "SU Board Approves Tuition Hike," *The Advocate*, July 6, 2012, accessed July 6, 2012, <http://theadvocate.com/news/3226349-123/su-board-approves-tuition-hike>.

⁶ WDSUNews, "SLU Braces for Higher Tuition: Tuition Increase to Take Effect in Fall," last modified June 28, 2012, accessed June 28, 2012. <http://www.wdsu.com/news/around-louisiana/SLU-braces-for-higher-tuition/-/9853348/15341196/-/fwrw0b/-/index.html>.

⁷ Koran Addo, "Cuts Have SU Looking Lean," *The Advocate*, July 6, 2012, accessed July 6, 2012, <http://theadvocate.com/news/3218436-123/cuts-have-su-looking-lean>.

⁸ Carolyn Kellogg, "Louisiana State Library Funding Has Been Eliminated," *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 2012, accessed June 28, 2012, <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/jacketcopy/2012/06/louisiana-eliminates-state-funding-for-libraries.html>.

⁹ Jeff Adelson, NOLA.com, "Library Technology Program Eliminated from Louisiana State Budget," last modified July 4, 2012, accessed July 6, 2012, http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2012/07/library_technology_program_eli.html.