

# Journal cancellations in university libraries in South Africa

Ruth Hoskins<sup>1</sup> and Christine Stilwell<sup>2</sup>

Information Studies, School of Sociology and Social Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal,  
[hoskinsr@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hoskinsr@ukzn.ac.za); [stilwell@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:stilwell@ukzn.ac.za)

Received: 10 February 2010

Accepted: 30 June 2010

*This article is based on part of a survey that investigated journal cancellations in university libraries in South Africa. A study population consisting of 17 university libraries in South Africa was surveyed by means of an online questionnaire to establish the factors that influenced journal cancellations. Interpretation of the results revealed that South African university libraries, like most academic and research libraries world wide, have been adversely affected by high priced journal subscriptions and many libraries have simply cancelled subscriptions to pay for ongoing subscriptions. Recommendations are made about enhancing library budgets and access to usage statistics, supporting consortia and avoiding restrictive journal packages.*

**Keywords:** Journal cancellations; university libraries; South African university libraries

## 1 Introduction and problem statement

Research librarians, that is, librarians who work in large college or university, and private research libraries, today face the difficult challenge of managing their collections and information services during a period of crisis and profound change in scholarly publications (Belle 2002: 29). The sheer volume of scholarly publications, the rising cost of this scholarship (particularly in the sciences) and the array of new options brought about by advances in information technology all conspire to make this a difficult but exciting time for research librarians. The crisis in scholarly communication has resulted in ongoing journal and monograph cuts in many academic libraries. Commercial publishers as a result of the monopoly control of the academic publishing system have annually increased journal or serial prices above the rate of inflation. Academic libraries with their ever limited budgets cannot afford to maintain their journal or serials subscriptions as a direct consequence of the crisis in scholarly communication. The crisis has therefore resulted in fewer scholarly resources being made available to scholars. It is this problem of journal cancellations that the study addresses within the context of the South African university library. Based on the above-mentioned problem, the following research questions guided the conduct of the study:

- Why are South African university libraries cancelling journals?
- Are South African university libraries cancelling print subscriptions in favour of electronic, and why?
- Who is involved in the decision to cancel?
- What journal cancellation processes are followed by the South African University libraries?
- What factors do South African university libraries consider when cancelling?

The study surveyed South African traditional and comprehensive university libraries. Universities of technology or technikon libraries were not included because research is not a major function for such institutions.

## 2 Review of the literature

As the inflation rate of journals has outstripped many library budgets, cancellation projects have become a routine part of library collection management for universities. Although there has been a growing effort to find a long-term solution to the serials crisis, academic libraries continue to depend on serial cancellation projects as a short-term, albeit necessary, response to continuing serial costs. These projects are extremely difficult to manage since decisions have serious implications for the collection and for library relations with academic departments. Deciding which journals should be cancelled becomes a difficult and frustrating task for librarians. Since few academic libraries have escaped the need to go through journal cancellation projects, the literature on serials cancellation is extensive. Therefore, possible approaches to journal cancellation projects are as varied as the libraries that conduct them (Moore-Jansen, Williams & Dadashzadeh 2001).

### 2.1 Studies on journal cancellations

There are many studies that have been conducted on journal cancellations in libraries. As early as the 1970s, reports appeared on the cancellation of journals by university libraries (Brennan 1977; Carrein 1977). In the 1980s a study conducted by Blake and Meadows (1984) investigated the characteristics of journals which are most likely to be cancelled

<sup>1</sup> Ruth Hoskins (PhD) is a lecturer in Information Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Christine Stilwell is Professor of Information Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

by British universities when faced with budget cuts. The study found that new journals were still being subscribed to, but generally at the expense of other journals or books (monographs). In terms of determining which journals were most at risk for cancellation, the study found that journals with characteristics of high prices, large price increases and foreign language journals were liable to be cancelled. Most librarians felt that academic evaluation of need was the greatest priority when deciding whether to cancel a journal.

In the 1990s a study by Sweeney (1999) described the continuing cancellation crisis in academic libraries in both the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK). In reviewing the literature Sweeney observed that serial librarians in academic libraries had to reduce their spending on print journals as a result of rising periodical prices together with reductions in funding. The study conducted by Sweeney (1999) noted that the prime concern was for the users' needs and an accurate measure of the current use of hard copy journals was an essential tool for the librarian faced with difficult decisions about continued subscriptions and cancellations. Sweeney (1999) conceded that the situation was not going to go away. In 1993, Chrzastowski and Schmidt described the situation in the US, where serial librarians in academic libraries were facing the same problems as their British counterparts and where it could also be said that, serial cancellation is an established trend (Chrzastowski & Schmidt 1993). In a later study Chrzastowski and Schmidt (1996) returned to the problem outlined in their earlier study and, "continue to sound the alarm about the diminishing serial collections held in academic libraries".

Enssle and Wilde (2002) provided a comprehensive survey of studies relating to journal cancellation. Although journal cancellations in academic libraries may be an established norm, bundled purchasing influences cancellations and has resulted in a paradigm shift for librarians.

Edwards and Shulenburger (2003), in explaining the consequences of bundling, note that libraries, in signing on to the package journal, have lost the freedom to drop individual journal subscriptions for a period of time (generally three years) and thus have obligated themselves to a fixed inflation rate for the packages (often 7% per year) for the duration. Whatever the merits of the 'big deal', Edwards and Shulenburger (2003) argue that it is a choice that is forced on libraries by commercial publishers who have significant market power over the libraries. The consensus is that once a library has signed onto the 'big deal', the publisher is able to exert even more market power over the library. In addition, Martell (2003) argues that cancelling print in favour of electronic journals has resulted in a paradigm shift since academic libraries could no longer maintain an adequate local print collection relative to their mission (collection paradigm). Instead they have adopted a paradigm that reflected the fiscal realities, namely, the access paradigm (Martell 2003). It could be argued that most university librarians are undergoing this paradigm shift that Martell (2003) refers to as they move from print to electronic journals. Their chief function would then be to facilitate access to these electronic resources.

## 2.2 The ACCUCOMS telemarketing effectiveness survey

Accurate Communication for Publication (ACCUCOMS), which provides specialist sales, marketing and customer services for commercial and society publishers, survey conducted during the period 2006 to 2007 provided vital information on why librarians cancel journal subscriptions. The main objective of the calls carried out for the survey was to renew lapsed subscriptions. The overall results were as follows (ACCUCOMS 2007: 3):

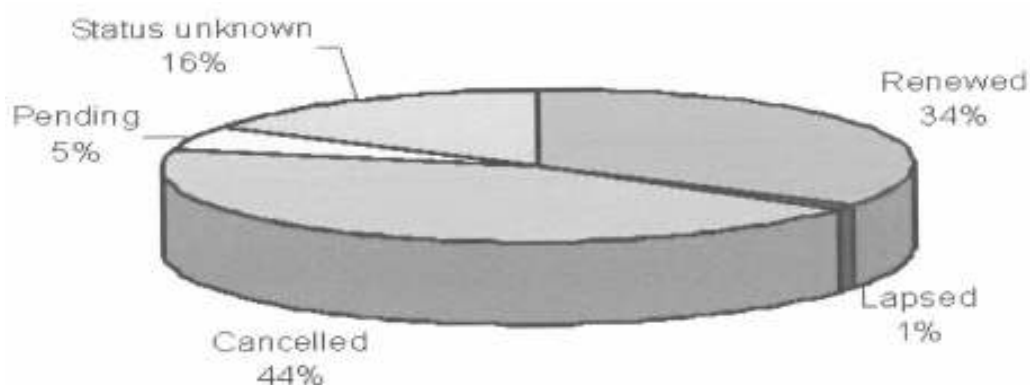


Figure 1 Lapsed subscriber campaign results

As a direct result of the renewal campaigns, Figure 1 shows over 34% of subscriptions were renewed and a further 5% were still pending. Of the 44% of subscriptions that were cancelled, the reasons given were as follows in Figure 2 (ACCUCOMS 2007: 3):

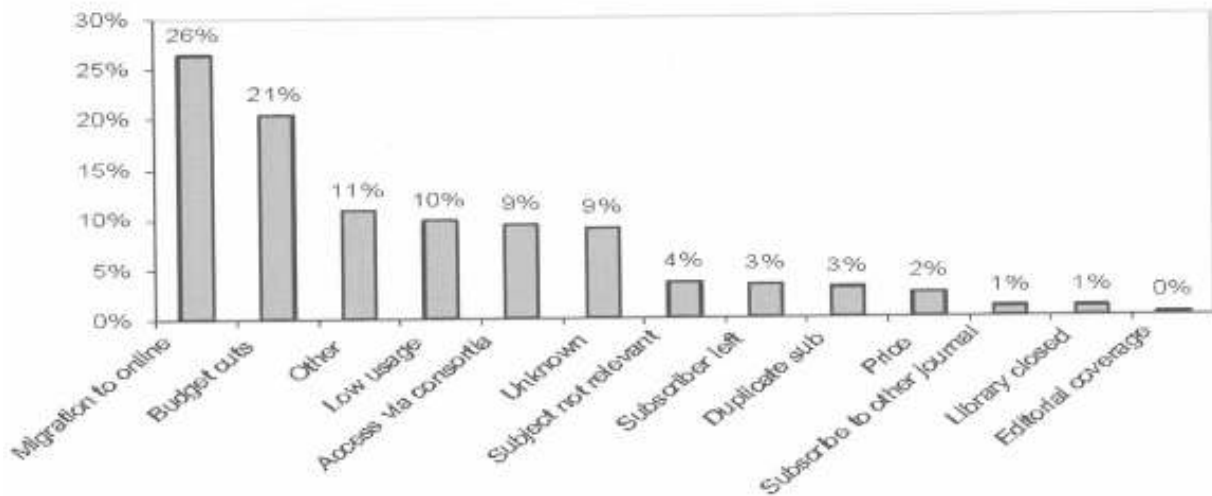


Figure 2 Cancellation reasons

Figure 2 shows the *primary* reasons given by librarians when asked why they had decided to cancel a journal. It is important to note however, that reasons for cancellations can often be multi-factorial in that there could be a number of contributing factors that librarians take into account when making a decision.

### 2.2.1 Moving to online access

Following the trend of the previous year, a shift from print to online continued to be the most common reason for cancelling a subscription with just over a quarter of print subscriptions being cancelled in favour of online access. What this data does not reveal is whether institutions favoured online access via a licensed database or an electronic subscription directly from the publisher (ACCUCOMS 2007).

### 2.2.2 Budget cuts

Given the feedback from the library sector about the state of their budgets, it is not surprising that the second most popular reason for cancelling subscriptions was budget cuts. However, even when budget cuts were stated as the primary reason for cancelling, many librarians stated that other factors were also taken into account such as usage statistics and subject relevancy. Perhaps surprisingly price was only cited as the primary reason for cancellation in 2% of cases. Librarians commented that an annual above inflation price increase and tiered pricing<sup>3</sup> schemes were a problem when taken in conjunction with budget cuts (ACCUCOMS 2007).

### 2.2.3 Usage

The survey revealed that 10% of cancellations were due to low usage, indicating that usage statistics have an important part to play in cancellation decisions. According to the ACCUCOMS (2007) study, usage statistics could play a larger part in the equation than the figures suggest. Since budget cuts are a key reason for cancelling a journal, many librarians conceded that the ultimate decision about which journals to cancel would have taken into account multiple factors and would include an analysis of usage statistics.

### 2.2.4 Duplicated access

ACCUCOMS (2007) data shows that 9% of subscriptions were cancelled due to access through consortia. This figure shows that libraries could make savings if they were part of a consortium.

## 2.3 The ALPSP survey of librarians on factors in journal cancellation

The Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP 2008), was founded in 1972, and is the only international association representing all types of not-for-profit publishers. This study was commissioned by ALPSP to

3 For the purposes of this study tiered pricing is defined as differential charges for both paper and electronic subscriptions to a journal based on the categorisation of the subscribing institution. Smaller institutions are usually granted a lower subscription price than larger institutions (Hahn 2005).

ascertain what were the major factors contributing to journal cancellations, and thus to provide some new information for a debate that has so far been short of data. Mark Ware of Mark Ware Consulting conducted the survey on behalf of the ALPSP.

A 26-question online questionnaire was posted on six listservs, including Liblicense, SERIALIST, and Lis-e-journals, with a single follow-up reminder one week later. The sample was thus a self-selected one from a non-random group (those who chose to join the listservs). Ware (2006) did acknowledge that this was a limitation of the study. Nisonger (2007: 247) in his review of the study highlights this limitation:

A rigorous doctoral dissertation committee would probably not be thrilled with the methodology. Ware himself acknowledges that the use of a self-selected group rather than a random sample could introduce error due to sample bias, as those with strong views are more likely to respond.

### 2.3.1 Results of the ALPSP study

The main findings of the study as reported by Ware (2006) were:

- The 340 responses were mainly from academic institutions (more than 80%), with 66% from universities carrying out both research and teaching. Only 8% were from corporate libraries. These were evenly spread among small, medium and large libraries. The subjects covered included all of Science and Technology, Medical and Healthcare, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Business and Management (and others, for example, Art) (Ware 2006: 6).
- The process of journal cancellations was a varied one but typically entails a consultative process involving both librarians and academics (or other library patrons). In most cases, the librarian is primarily responsible for initiating the decision to cancel a journal (for example, via an analysis of its usage or other factors) and for the final decision to cancel (Ware 2006: 7).
- The three most important factors used to determine journals for cancellation, in declining order of importance, were that the academics no longer required them (i.e. relevance to research or teaching programme), usage and price. Next, availability of the content via Open Access (OA) archives and availability via aggregators were ranked equally fourth, but some way behind the first three factors. The journal's impact factor and availability via delayed OA were ranked as relatively unimportant. Other important factors were the perceived quality, importance or centrality of the journal, and the protection from cancellation afforded some journals either by inclusion in some kind of package, or because of local academic involvement (for example, on the editorial board) (Ware 2006: 10).
- Taking these factors in turn, for price the most important factors were the absolute price and the percentage increase. Price per use, although mentioned quite frequently in the free-text responses, was only scored as of middling importance, while price per article or price per page was hardly used at all (Ware 2006: 11).
- With usage, the most important data were the online statistics provided by the publisher or intermediary. The library's own online statistics were ranked significantly lower, while print usage (perhaps not surprisingly) was the least important (Ware 2006: 12).
- The important factors affecting whether inclusion in an aggregation product would play a part in determining whether a journal was a candidate for cancellation were, in declining order: the length of any embargo, the extent of the archive in the aggregation and the promptness with which new material was added. The degree of functionality of the product was considered relatively unimportant. It was clear from the open-ended responses that one of the key reasons that librarians do not regard aggregations as substitutes for journal subscriptions is the perceived lack of stability of the content and lack of access to previously removed content (Ware 2006: 13).

## 3 Methodology

The current study adopted a quantitative approach which involved the collection of data in the form of numbers and the use of statistical data analysis. A two-pronged method of data collection was adopted. The two methods used were the search for and review of the relevant literature and the use of survey research.

Previous studies relating to journal cancellations by Blake and Meadows (1984), Sweeney (1999) and the ALPSP (2008) used the quantitative approach with questionnaires being the major instrument for data collection. The present quantitative study used an online self-administered questionnaire (created using SurveyMonkey) directed to the heads of university libraries in South Africa as the key source of data. In the absence of a library head the periodicals or serials librarian completed the survey. The questionnaire of the ALPSP was adopted, adapted for the current study and then pre-tested before being used in the local context. The population of the study were the university libraries in South Africa. The seventeen units of analysis were drawn from the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) Heads of Academic Libraries list. A total of 12 university libraries (representing 70.6%) responded. The survey data was evaluated and analysed using SPSS. In terms of ethical considerations the online self-administered questionnaire was anonymous and all responses were treated as confidential. Results were analysed in terms of frequency of responses and graphically displayed in the form of figures and tables.

## 4 Results and discussion

In an attempt to answer the research questions of the study the order of the discussion in this section follows that of the order of the key research questions of the study

### 4.1 Subject areas covered by library collection

A multiple response question was asked to determine the subject areas represented in the university libraries' collections

Table 1 reflects the subject areas

**Table 1** Subject areas represented in the libraries (N= 12)

| Subject areas                  | Responses |         |
|--------------------------------|-----------|---------|
|                                | Yes       | Percent |
| Science and Technology         | 12        | 100%    |
| Humanities and Social Sciences | 12        | 100%    |
| Law                            | 12        | 100%    |
| Business and Management        | 11        | 91.7%   |
| Medicine and Healthcare        | 10        | 83.3%   |

All 12 of the university libraries' collections covered the science and technology, humanities and social sciences and law subject areas. Only one library's collection did not cater for the business and management field while two other libraries did not cover medicine and healthcare in their collections. Thus 83.3% of the university libraries which responded to the survey had a multidisciplinary collection.

### 4.2 Number of current journal subscriptions

A question was asked to determine the approximate number of current journal subscriptions that were accessible to library users at each university library. These current subscriptions included both individual licenses or subscriptions and multi-journal ('big deal') subscriptions. The approximate number of current journal subscriptions accessible to library users at each university library is reflected in Table 2.

**Table 2** Number of journals subscribed to (N= 12)

| Number of journals | Responses |         |
|--------------------|-----------|---------|
|                    | Frequency | Percent |
| 51 349             | 4         | 33.3%   |
| 46 780             |           |         |
| 40 000             |           |         |
| 30 000             |           |         |
| 27 000             | 3         | 25%     |
| 23 000             |           |         |
| 20 000             |           |         |
| 6 500              | 4         | 33.3%   |
| 2 769              |           |         |
| 2 000              |           |         |
| 1 300              |           |         |
| 758                | 1         | 8.3%    |
| <b>Total</b>       | 12        | 100%    |

Table 2 is an indication of the size of each of the university libraries' periodicals collection and the number of titles that were accessible to users at each of the libraries. The number of journal titles held by the university libraries in South Africa ranged from 51 349 to 758. Only one (8.3%) library's collection contained less than 1 000 journals. This finding reveals that users of South Africa university libraries have access to varying amounts of periodical literature depending on

the institution. All these university libraries, particularly the smaller libraries, will have to maintain their periodical collections to ensure that users' access to this periodical literature is not eroded further by cancellations.

#### 4.3 Recent journal cancellations

A question was asked to determine if the university libraries had cancelled journals in the last five years. All 12 university libraries had cancelled journals in the last five years. Thus none of the libraries which responded were exempt from journal cancellations. In terms of the literature, Moore-Jansen, Williams and Dadashzadeh (2001), Martell (2003), Sweeney (1999) and Chrzastowski and Schmidt (1993) argued that although there has been a growing effort to find a long-term solution to the serials crisis, academic libraries continue to depend on serial cancellation projects as a short-term response to continuing serial costs. As the inflation rate of journals outstrips many library budgets, cancellation projects have become a routine part of library collection management for universities. Thus, like most academic libraries worldwide university libraries in South Africa are cancelling journal titles for various reasons.

#### 4.4 Reasons for journal cancellations

A multiple response question as a follow-up to the previous question required the respondents who had cancelled journals to explain why they had cancelled journals. Reasons provided for journal cancellations are reflected in Table 3.

**Table 3** Reasons for journal cancellations in the past five years (N= 12)

| Reasons for journal cancellations   | Responses |         |
|---|-----------|---------|
|   | Yes       | Percent |
| Cuts in periodicals budget  | 5         | 41.7%   |
| Price increase  | 5         | 41.7%   |
| High price  | 4         | 33.3%   |
| Duplication of subscriptions resulting from an institutional merger           | 2         | 16.7%   |
| Print journals cancelled where electronic version is accessible in a database | 2         | 16.7%   |
| Changes in curriculum   | 1         | 8.3%    |
| Not meeting teaching and research needs                                       | 1         | 8.3%    |
| Subject area no longer taught   | 1         | 8.3%    |
| Replacing print subscriptions with online                                     | 1         | 8.3%    |

The main reasons why university libraries have been cancelling journal titles as seen in Table 3, included in order of declining importance:

- Cuts in periodical budgets (41.7%) – in the ACCUCOMS (2007) study the second most popular reason for cancelling subscriptions was budget cuts. However, in the ACCUCOMS (2007) study, even when budget cuts were stated as the primary reason for cancelling, many librarians stated that other factors were also taken into account such as usage statistics and subject relevancy.
- Price increases in journal titles (41.7%) – in the ACCUCOMS (2007) study price was only cited as the primary reason for cancellation by 2% of the cases.
- The high price of journals (33.3%)
- Institutional mergers of academic institutions had resulted in duplication of subscriptions at two (16.7%) of the university libraries. In the ACCUCOMS (2007) study data showed that 9% of subscriptions were cancelled due to duplication.
- Print journals were cancelled when an electronic version became available by two (16.7%) of the libraries. In the ACCUCOMS (2007) study a shift from print to online continued to be the most common reason for cancelling a subscription with just over a quarter of print subscriptions being cancelled in favour of online access.
- Reasons for cancelling as a result of curricula concerns were provided by three (25%) libraries that cancelled due to changes in the curriculum (one or 8.3%), journal titles that were not relevant because they did not meet the institution's teaching or research needs (one or 8.3%), and titles for subject areas that were no longer taught (one or 8.3%). In the ACCUCOMS (2007) study only 4% of the libraries cancelled as a result of the subject not being relevant.

Therefore, the primary reasons why South African university libraries were forced to undertake journal cancellations were as a result of budget cuts, and journal pricing issues. Also, instead of providing a reason for cancelling, one (8.3%) of the university libraries pointed out that they could not cancel titles that were tied-up in a 'big deal'. Therefore, one could

argue that South African university libraries have also succumbed to the consequences of the 'big deal' by not being able to get out of the deal they signed with a commercial publisher as noted by Edwards and Shulenburger (2003)

#### 4.5 Cancelling of print in favour of electronic

A question was asked to determine if the university libraries had cancelled print subscriptions in favour of electronic in the last five years. Of the 12 university libraries, a majority of 11 (91.7%) had cancelled print subscriptions in favour of electronic. Thus many of the university libraries were replacing their print subscriptions with electronic titles for various reasons. In terms of cancelling print in favour of electronic, which was cited as a reason for cancellation, all the libraries (91.7%) except one had cancelled print in favour of electronic journals. In doing so, libraries now provide access to resources wherever they are located. Thus the role of the librarian has shifted even more from that of 'keeper of information' to 'facilitator of access to information' as was noted by Martell (2003).

##### 4.5.1 Reasons for cancellation of print in favour of electronic

Libraries which had cancelled print subscriptions in favour of electronic were asked to explain why they had cancelled. Table 4 reveals the reasons why the 11 university libraries cancelled print subscriptions in favour of electronic. Some respondents provided more than one reason for why they cancelled print in favour of electronic.

**Table 4** Reasons for cancelling print journals in favour of electronic (N=11)

| Reasons for cancelling print journals in favour of electronic   | Responses |         |
|---|-----------|---------|
|   | Frequency | Percent |
| Increased accessibility on and off campus   | 3         | 27.3%   |
| It is cost effective  | 3         | 27.3%   |
| Collection development policy prefers electronic to paper<br>e.g. cancellation of all Elsevier and Institute of Physics (IOP) print titles for electronic | 3         | 27.3%   |
| Preferred means of access for academics especially in science and medicine  | 2         | 18.2%   |
| It eliminates binding and claiming  | 2         | 18.2%   |
| Does not take up storage space  | 1         | 9.1%    |
| Mostly due to budget constraints  | 1         | 9.1%    |
| Cannot be stolen or mutilated   | 1         | 9.1%    |
| No response   | 1         | 9.1%    |

The main reasons the libraries provided for moving to electronic journals were that such a strategy increased accessibility (27.3%), was cost effective (27.3%) and was thus preferred as part of the libraries' collection development policy (27.3%). The respondents provided examples of this preference by cancelling Elsevier and Institute of Physics print titles for electronic. From a workload perspective, the elimination of administrative duties for library staff, such as binding and claiming of journal titles, was also a reason to cancel print for 18.2% libraries.

#### 4.6 Subscribing to new journals

University libraries were asked if they were still subscribing to new journals. All 12 university libraries were still subscribing to new journal titles. This finding is significant given that all 12 were cancelling titles as well.

##### 4.6.1 Restrictions on new journal subscriptions

Libraries which were subscribing to new journals were asked to indicate any restrictions they were imposing on new journal subscriptions. Table 5 reveals the restrictions university libraries were imposing on new journal subscriptions. Respondents could provide more than one reason.

According to five (41.7%) of the university libraries, new journals could only be subscribed to if journals of equal price were cancelled. This finding reveals that budgetary constraints were the main restriction on subscribing to new journal titles. This restriction in reality meant that libraries were not increasing their collections with new titles, but were only allowed to subscribe to new titles once they had removed certain titles to free up enough money for the new journal subscription. Blake and Meadows' (1984) study also found that new journals were still being subscribed to, but generally at the expense of other journals or books. At two (16.7%) universities, new journals could only be subscribed to if academic departments made the funding available for these new titles. An interesting restriction imposed by two (16.7%) university libraries depended on the cost of the title where it was argued that South African titles were cheaper so could

be subscribed to. However, more expensive titles could only be subscribed to if something else was cancelled. New print titles were not subscribed to by two (16.7%) of the libraries if they were available in an electronic database. A reasonable demand for the new journal was mentioned by one (8.3%) library. Relevance of the new journal was only a consideration for one (8.3%) of the libraries.

**Table 5** New journal subscription restrictions (N=12)

| New journal subscription restrictions   | Responses |         |
|---|-----------|---------|
|   | Frequency | Percent |
| New journals are only considered if journals of equal price are cancelled   | 5         | 41.7%   |
| Department must make funding available from their book fund   | 2         | 16.7%   |
| Depends on cost of periodical e.g. cheaper titles (such as South African titles) can be purchased without having to cancel anything. The more expensive titles and/or databases | 2         | 16.7%   |
| Will not subscribe to new print if already available electronically in databases subscribed to  | 2         | 16.7%   |
| Electronic subscriptions favoured over print  | 1         | 8.3%    |
| There should be a reasonable demand for a title   | 1         | 8.3%    |
| New title should be relevant and complement the collection  | 1         | 8.3%    |
| No response   | 1         | 8.3%    |

#### 4.7 Who initiates decision to cancel?

University libraries were asked to determine who at the university was responsible for initiating the decision to cancel a journal. In the present study it was found that at South African universities more academics (58.3%) than librarians (41.7%) were primarily responsible for initiating the decision to cancel. However, this was not the case in the ALPSP (Ware 2006) study where librarians were primarily responsible for initiating the decision to cancel. One could argue that if cancellations are a routine way of coping with the serials' crisis then librarians should be initiating the decision to cancel.

##### 4.7.1 Who is involved in the decision to cancel?

A multiple response question was asked to determine who at the university was involved in, or had input to, the decision to cancel a journal. All of the university libraries, 12 (100%) maintained that librarians were involved in the decision to cancel journal titles, while 11 (91.7%) said that academic staff were involved in the decision to cancel journal titles. This shows that both librarians and academic staff at most of the universities were involved in the decision to cancel journal titles with the exception of one university library.

##### 4.7.2 Who makes the final decision to cancel?

A question was asked to determine who at the university was ultimately responsible for the final decision to cancel a journal. At more than half of the universities that responded (seven or 58.3%), the librarians were ultimately responsible for the final decision to cancel a title. Only four (33.3%) of the university libraries said that academic staff were responsible for the final decision to cancel, while one (8.3%) university library maintained that the final decision to cancel depended on whether the funding for the journal title was controlled by librarians or academics. Thus, at this university if funding for journal titles was controlled by academic staff, it could be inferred that librarians would not have much control over the decision to cancel a title.

#### 4.8 Process for deciding which journal to cancel

A question was asked to determine what process was used by the university libraries to cancel journals. Table 6 shows the processes used by the university libraries.

Like the ALPSP study (Ware 2006) the process of journal cancellations was a varied one but typically entailed a consultative process involving both librarians and academics as shown in Table 6. Each library explained their process for cancelling journals. Although the process may vary across the university libraries there were similarities. The process mentioned by each of the libraries above shows that librarians engage in journal cancellations on a regular basis, often annually. These include the consultation with academic staff to determine if a journal was still relevant. At this stage the journal could be ranked according to relevance. The university libraries also make use of various statistics to ascertain usage. A further important consideration during the process was the cost of the journal. Many of the libraries have formalised collection development policies or guidelines that assist them with the process. Table 7 provides a more



detailed analysis of the methods used for evaluating a journal when deciding to cancel. Some libraries used more than one of the methods, hence the multiple responses.

**Table 6** Process for deciding which journal to cancel (N= 12)

|   |
|---|
| Process for deciding journal cancellation   |
| A title is proposed by an academic and/or a subject librarian. The title is evaluated against current teaching and research needs within the whole university. Holdings at other South Africa libraries are also a factor.  |
| Academic staff evaluate their current subscriptions on a yearly basis and decide which are still relevant or not.   |
| Academic staff identify whether content is no longer applicable, library staff identifies factors pertaining to budget, non-deliverance, duplicates, very high price, electronically available, sufficient coverage of subject, cancellation recommendations made annually to Collection Development Committee.   |
| Acquisitions Policy (draft) states that a periodical should only be cancelled for academic reasons. Library has cancelled only those titles which were unnecessarily duplicated at more than one campus. Titles were identified by Head of Technical Services. Notice sent out to relevant faculty and subject librarians in advance and, provided there are no objections, title is not renewed for following subscription period. |
| Current journal subscription lists are sent to faculties annually to review and consider for renewal/cancellation.  |
| Currently looking for online packages and going online only.  |
| Firstly the price and usage of the journal are checked, secondly who subscribes to it and whether they still work for the university.   |
| From 2003 annual ranking lists are distributed to the departments during the first semester. Those journals which are given rankings of 4 or 5 by the academic staff are cancelled automatically.   |
| Heads of Departments or Library Representatives in departments are approached by the Periodicals Librarian mid-year for cancellations. The department makes the decision.   |
| If a journal is not used and current issues are available in a database.  |
| Liaise with faculty to determine usage. If any title is not used optimally, it is considered for cancellation. Conduct cost-benefit analysis. Ascertain alignment to curricula and collection development policy. Academic departments are consulted to reach agreement on cancellations. The trend is to consider online as opposed to print formats because a larger audience can be reached.                                     |
| Usage statistics and price relevancy.   |

**Table 7** Evaluation methods for deciding which journal to cancel (N= 12)

| Evaluation methods                                   | Responses |         |
|--|-----------|---------|
|  | Frequency | Percent |
| Evaluate usage                                       | 4         | 33.3%   |
| Evaluate against current teaching and research needs | 4         | 33.3%   |
| Check for electronic availability                    | 4         | 33.3%   |
| Evaluate price                                       | 3         | 25%     |
| Check for duplicates                                 | 2         | 16.7%   |
| Check for holdings at other South African libraries  | 1         | 8.3%    |
| Check if journal has sufficient coverage of subject  | 1         | 8.3%    |
| Evaluate journal by ranking                          | 1         | 8.3%    |

Journals were evaluated for usage and to see if they met the current teaching and research needs of the institution as well as checked to see if they were available electronically by four (33.3%) libraries each respectively. This was followed by three (25%) libraries that evaluated the price of the journal in deciding which journals to cancel. Of the 12 libraries, two (16.7%) libraries checked for duplicates (ACCUCOMS 2007). The checking of holdings at other South African libraries, and if the journal had sufficient coverage of subjects was used by one (8.3%) library each respectively. The ranking of journals was used as a method by one (8.3%) library.

#### 4.9 Factors considered when cancelling

A question was asked to determine which factors were considered important and the degree of importance in the process used to make a decision to cancel a journal at the university libraries. Table 8 reveals the factors that were considered important in the process university libraries used to make a decision to cancel a journal.

**Table 8** Factors considered when cancelling (N= 12)

| Factors considered when cancelling              | Very important |       | Important |       | Neutral |       | Unimportant |       | No response |      |
|---|----------------|-------|-----------|-------|---------|-------|-------------|-------|-------------|------|
|   | Count          | %     | Count     | %     | Count   | %     | Count       | %     | Count       | %    |
| Academic staff no longer require it             | 9              | 75%   | 3         | 25%   | 0       | 0     | 0           | 0     | 0           | 0    |
| Usage   | 8              | 66.7% | 4         | 33.3% | 0       | 0     | 0           | 0     | 0           | 0    |
| Price   | 6              | 50%   | 3         | 25%   | 3       | 25%   | 0           | 0     | 0           | 0    |
| Availability of content in aggregated databases | 6              | 50%   | 3         | 25%   | 1       | 8.3%  | 2           | 16.7% | 0           | 0    |
| Free availability-open access archive           | 4              | 33.3% | 5         | 41.7% | 2       | 16.7% | 1           | 8.3%  | 0           | 0    |
| Impact factor/impact factor ratings             | 3              | 25%   | 4         | 33.3% | 4       | 33.3% | 0           | 0     | 1           | 8.3% |
| Free availability- journal's website            | 1              | 8.3%  | 6         | 50%   | 2       | 16.7% | 3           | 25%   | 0           | 0    |

Like the ALPSP study (Ware 2006) the fact that academic staff no longer required a journal title was considered very important when cancelling by nine (75%) of the university libraries and important by three (25%) of the libraries. This was followed by journal usage which was considered as very important when cancelling by eight (66.7%) of the libraries and important by four (33.3%) of the libraries. The price of a title and its availability in an aggregated database were each considered very important by half (six or 50%) of the libraries and important by three (25%) of the libraries. The free availability of a title in an open access archive was considered very important by four (33.3%) libraries and important by five (41.7%) libraries. The impact factor or impact factor ratings were considered very important by three (25%) libraries and important by four (33.3%) libraries. The free availability of content on the journal's website was only considered very important by one (8.3%) library and important by six (50%) libraries.

The free availability of content on a journal's website was also considered as an unimportant factor when cancelling by three (25%) of the libraries which was followed by two (16.7%) libraries that considered the availability of content in an aggregated database as unimportant. The free availability of content is an important concern for libraries as noted earlier particularly since the majority of the libraries 11 (91.7%) had cancelled print titles in favour of electronic. Libraries did not regard any of these factors as not at all important therefore this category is not reflected in Table 8.

##### 4.9.1 Aspects of price

A question was asked to determine which aspects of price were considered important in order to determine cancellation at the university libraries. Table 9 reveals the aspects of price that were considered important by the university libraries in order to determine cancellation.

As noted above the price of the overall package was considered very important and important by five (41.7%) libraries each. Absolute price was considered very important by three (25%) libraries and important by six (50%) libraries. The percentage increase was considered very important by five (41.7%) libraries and important by three (25%) libraries. Price per use was considered very important and important by three (25%) libraries each. Of the 12 libraries, seven (58.3%) were neutral when considering the price per article followed by five (41.7%) libraries each for the price per use and per page.

Price per page was considered unimportant by two (16.7%) libraries and not at all important by three (25%) of the libraries. This was followed by one (8.3%) library which considered price per article to be unimportant and a further two (16.7%) libraries maintained that price per article was not at all important in terms of price. These results are similar to the findings of the ALPSP (Ware 2006) and ACCUCOMS (2007) studies.

**Table 9** Aspects of price (N=12)

| Aspect of price          | Very important |       | Important |       | Neutral |       | Unimportant |       | Not at all important |       | No response |       |
|--------------------------|----------------|-------|-----------|-------|---------|-------|-------------|-------|----------------------|-------|-------------|-------|
|                          | Count          | %     | Count     | %     | Count   | %     | Count       | %     | Count                | %     | Count       | %     |
| Percentage increase      | 5              | 41.7% | 3         | 25%   | 2       | 16.7% | 1           | 8.3%  | 0                    | 0     | 1           | 8.3%  |
| Price of overall package | 5              | 41.7% | 5         | 41.7% | 1       | 8.3%  | 0           | 0     | 0                    | 0     | 1           | 8.3%  |
| Absolute price           | 3              | 25%   | 6         | 50%   | 3       | 25%   | 0           | 0     | 0                    | 0     | 0           | 0     |
| Price per use            | 3              | 25%   | 3         | 25%   | 5       | 41.7% | 0           | 0     | 0                    | 0     | 1           | 8.3%  |
| Price per page           | 0              | 0     | 0         | 0     | 5       | 41.7% | 2           | 16.7% | 3                    | 25%   | 2           | 16.7% |
| Price per article        | 0              | 0     | 1         | 8.3%  | 7       | 58.3% | 1           | 8.3%  | 2                    | 16.7% | 1           | 8.3%  |

#### 4.9.2 Evaluating usage

A question was asked to determine which methods of evaluating usage were considered important in determining cancellation by the university libraries. Table 10 shows the methods.

**Table 10** Evaluating usage (N=12)

| Evaluating usage                       | Very important |       | Important |       | Neutral |       | Unimportant |       |
|--|----------------|-------|-----------|-------|---------|-------|-------------|-------|
|  | Count          | %     | Count     | %     | Count   | %     | Count       | %     |
| Online usage statistics from publisher | 7              | 58.3% | 4         | 33.3% | 1       | 8.3%  | 0           | 0     |
| Online usage collected by institution  | 6              | 50%   | 4         | 33.3% | 2       | 16.7% | 0           | 0     |
| Estimated print usage                  | 4              | 33.3% | 1         | 8.3%  | 5       | 41.7% | 2           | 16.7% |

Table 10 shows that evaluating online usage statistics from publishers was considered a very important method in determining cancellation by seven (58.3%) of the libraries and important by four (33.3%) of the libraries. This was followed by reviewing online usage statistics collected by the institution which was considered a very important method of determining cancellation by half of the libraries (six or 50%) and important by four (33.3%) of the libraries. Estimated print usage was considered very important by four (33.3%) libraries and important by one (8.3%) library. Of the 12 libraries, five (41.7%) were neutral on the estimated print usage.

Only two (16.7%) libraries considered the estimated print usage as an unimportant method. Libraries did not regard any of these methods as not at all important therefore this category is not reflected in Table 10.

## 5 Conclusion and recommendations

All 12 university libraries which responded to the questionnaire had cancelled journals in the last five years. Thus no university library in South Africa was exempt from journal cancellations. University libraries in South Africa have been forced to undertake journal cancellations as a result of budget cuts and journal pricing issues. Journal cancellation projects have become a routine part of university library collection management activities. Also, university libraries, like other academic and research libraries throughout the world, have succumbed to the consequences of the 'big deal'.

All 12 libraries, except one, had cancelled print in favour of electronic subscriptions. As a result the role of South African university librarians has changed from keeper of information to facilitator of access to information. This move from ownership to leasing of information has created new administrative duties for South African university librarians. The chief function for the libraries is now to facilitate access to electronic resources. The libraries' move from print to electronic journal subscriptions has however increased accessibility for library users in some regards. South African university libraries are still subscribing to new journal titles. However, libraries are imposing restrictions on new title subscriptions and a new journal title is generally only subscribed to when a journal of equal price is cancelled. Therefore, libraries are not increasing the size of their collections with the new titles purchased. South African journal titles which are cheaper than international titles can still be subscribed to as a more affordable option. However, it must be noted that by

reducing their subscriptions to lower tier journals South African university libraries may in a way be restricting access to the research of developing researchers

The process of journal cancellation varies but typically entails a consultative process involving both librarians and academics. More academics than librarians are primarily responsible for initiating the decision to cancel journals at South African universities. However, more librarians than academics are responsible for the final decision to cancel a journal. Based on the above conclusions the following recommendations were made by the study:

- Since many have argued that the routine cancellation process is a result of restrictive library budgets, University librarians should lobby and motivate not only for a minimum of a 6% institutional budget allocation, but should also ensure that the allocation made to the library takes inflation into account (Willemse 2002)
- 'Big deal' packages are an added burden for the university libraries since they are not able to get out of these deals which they sign with commercial publishers and therefore cannot readily cancel titles that are part of the package even if such titles are not required by the library. Librarians should avoid signing agreements for such restrictive deals
- Since budget cuts are a key reason for cancelling a journal, many librarians conceded that the ultimate decision about which journals to cancel would have taken into account multiple factors and would include an analysis of usage statistics. Librarians should therefore keep accurate usage statistics and such statistics should be collated regularly
- Many university libraries cancel subscriptions due to access through consortia. Such consortium efforts should be expanded to affect further savings for university libraries in South Africa

## References

- ACCUCOMS. 2007. How to boost your renewals: a practical guide. [Online]. <http://www.accucoms.com/about/HowToBoostYourRenewals.pdf>. Accessed 12 March 2008
- Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers. 2008. About the ALPSP. [Online]. <http://www.alpsp.org>. Accessed 12 March 2008
- Belle, J. 2002. Revenge of the librarians: journal prices under siege. *Econtent*, May:29-34
- Blake, M. & Meadows, A. 1984. Journals at risk. *Journal of Librarianship*, 16(2):118-119
- Brennan, M. 1977. Periodical cancellations: what happened at Hull. *BLL Review*, 5(2):67-73
- Carrein, L. 1977. Periodicals review: Newcastle upon Tyne University. In *Proceedings of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Blackwells Periodicals Conference*. Newcastle: Blackwells, pp.96-102
- Chrzastowski, T. & Schmidt, K. 1993. Surveying the damage: academic library serial cancellations 1987-88 through 1989-90. *College and Research Libraries*, 54(2):93-102
- Chrzastowski, T. & Schmidt, K. 1996. Collections at risk: revisiting serial cancellations in academic libraries. *College and Research Libraries*, 57(4):351-364
- Edwards, R. & Shulenburger, D. 2003. The high cost of scholarly journals (and what to do about it). *Change*, 35(6):10-19
- Enssle, H. & Wilde, M. 2002. So you have to cancel journals?: statistics that help. *Library Collections, Acquisitions, and Technical Services*, 26:259-281
- Hahn, K. 2005. Tiered pricing: implications for library collections. *Portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 5(2):151-163
- Martell, C. 2003. The role of librarians in the twenty-first century. *Encyclopedia of library and information science*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Marcel Dekker. vol. 8, pp.2524-2536
- Moore-Jansen, C., Williams, J. & Dadashzadeh, M. 2001. Is a decision support system enough?: tactical versus strategic solutions to the serials pricing crisis. *Serials Review*, 27(3/4):48-61
- Nisonger, T. 2007. ALPSP survey of librarians on factors in journal cancellation. *The Serials Librarian*, 53(1/2):246-248
- Sweeney, L. 1999. Confronting crisis: the importance of measuring the use of paper journals in academic libraries. *New World Library*, 100(1147):72-79
- Ware, M. 2006. *ALPSP survey of librarians on factors in journal cancellation*. West Sussex: ALPSP
- Willemse, J. 2002. *Library funding: adequate financial support for African university funding*. Oxford: INASP