

Librarians Must Have the Authority to Cancel Subscriptions to Seldom-Used Journals

"WHAT? *Philosophical Magazine* has been canceled?!"
"Yes, Professor Ransom, it has."

"How can you do that? It is central to my research! You don't understand."

"Yes, I do understand. But, Professor Ransom, the subscription price increased another 30 per cent this year, and our records indicate it was checked out only twice last year."

"That makes no difference! That is an important journal. The library can't cancel it!"

Such scenes are likely to be played out many times in the days ahead. Unfortunately, costs of professional journals will continue to spiral upward in 1991, straining the budgets of many college and university libraries. For example:

- The price of *Philosophical Magazine: A, B, and C* (Taylor and Francis, United Kingdom) has increased 45 per cent, from \$775 to \$1,125, with no increase in the number of issues.

- *International Journal of Fracture* (Kluwer Academic Publishers) will double the number of issues published in 1991 from 12 to 24, but the price increased 154 per cent, from \$437 to \$1,112.

- *Biopolymers* (John Wiley) grew from one annual volume of 14 issues to two volumes of 28 issues and increased its price by 103 per cent, from \$775 to \$1,575.

- *Energy Sources* (Taylor and Francis, United Kingdom) still publishes quarterly but increased its price by 58 per cent, from \$120 to \$190.

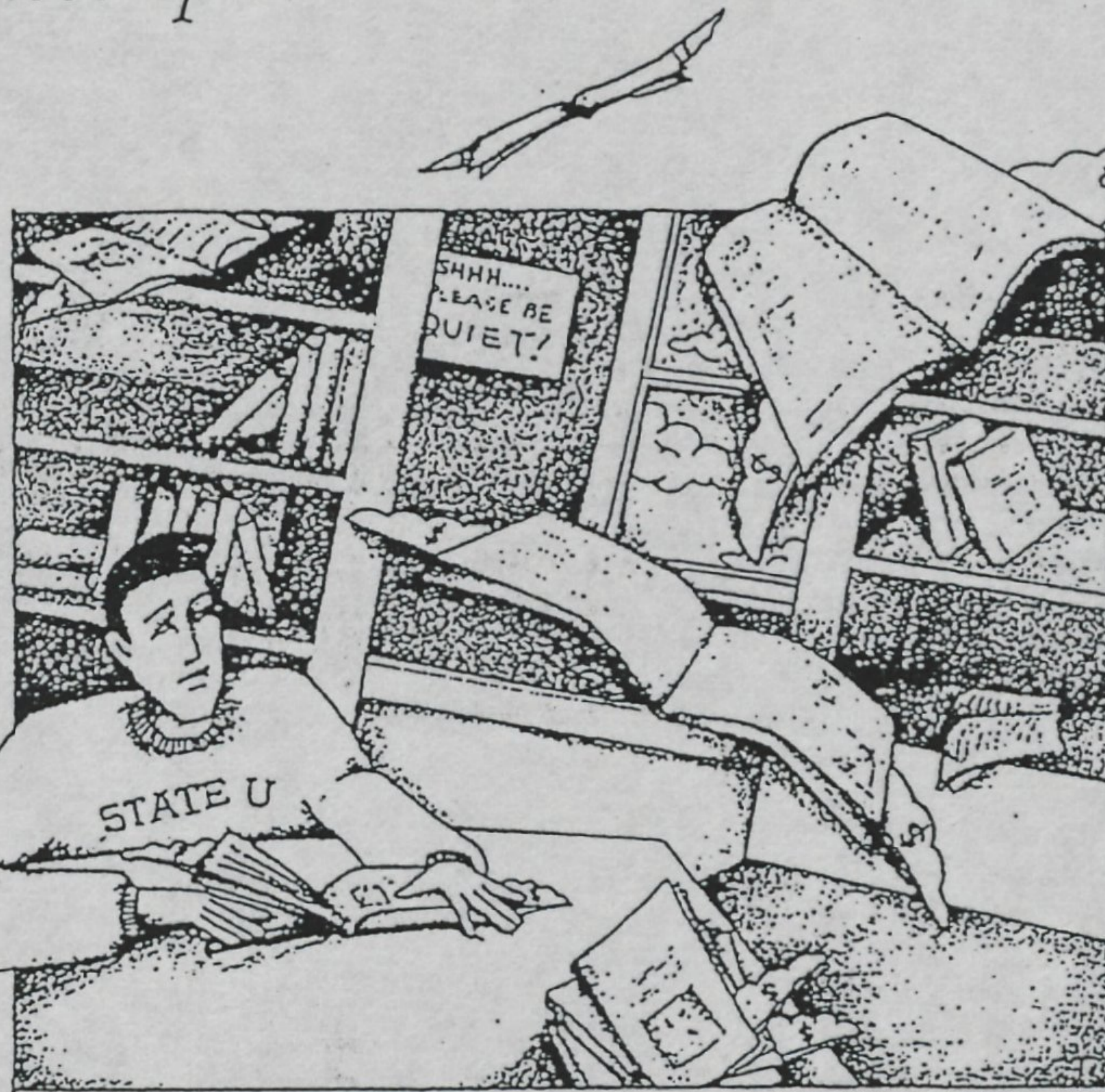
- *Concurrency* (John Wiley, United Kingdom) changed from a quarterly to a bimonthly and raised its price from \$155 to \$270, a 74-per-cent increase.

While it is true that the value of the dollar has been falling and that some journals continue to expand the number of issues and pages they publish each year, rising prices are making it increasingly difficult for librarians to meet faculty members' demands for subscriptions and still balance their budgets.

The current price increases are a replay of the mid-1980's, but circumstances have changed since then. In 1985, most librarians were caught by surprise. We hardly understood what was happening, let alone the underlying causes, which included increased production costs, devaluation of the dollar, increased numbers of pages published, and publishers' profiteering. Most faculty members and researchers were totally unaware of the havoc periodical publishers were wreaking on libraries.

The explosion of prices in the mid-80's triggered a variety of reactions. Librarians protested and generated voluminous data to support their allegations that the price increases were not justified. They threatened to boycott certain publishers, canceled subscriptions, began sharing periodicals with other libraries, and robbed their budgets for purchase of monographs to pay for subscriptions.

This time around, it is not just librarians who are concerned. Learned societies and professional associations also are raising the alarm. In articles and meetings, they have publicized the problem of prohibitive journal costs and the need for publishers to moderate price increases. Some university administrators have urged sweeping reforms. Why shouldn't universities become more active as publishers, printing research that traditionally has appeared in scholarly journals? Why shouldn't universities seek to gain control of the



THELSEA SHELDON, FOR THE CHRONICLE

copyrights to research produced by faculty members? After all, they reason, why should universities pay twice for the same research?

So our often-lethargic academic community definitely has been aroused. What has been the result?

Nothing really has happened at all. Either universities' protests have been ignored or our actions have not been strong enough to persuade publishers to limit their price increases. What, then, should our next steps be?

While there are no perfect solutions, if libraries are

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willing to alter long-standing practices, they could take a few steps to inject some price restraint into the periodicals market. For one thing, they could cancel subscriptions to journals that still are considered prestigious but that are no longer consulted much because they are not at the cutting edge of a discipline. (Cancellations stemming from the last round of price increases have weeded out duplicate subscriptions and specialized journals that are neither prestigious nor consulted frequently; but most prestigious titles so far have escaped the budget ax.) It now may be more important to provide a collection of journals currently in demand than to provide an unbroken run of bound volumes of journals that are rarely consulted. Libraries traditionally have tried both to acquire collections for future use and to respond to the current needs of users. We may not be able to continue to do both.

Librarians who cancel subscriptions to seldom-used periodicals may invite verbal abuse from the few faculty members affected. But I remember perusing our stacks a few years ago and discovering numerous journals whose mail wrappers were unopened or that were covered with dust. Such anecdotal evidence, plus a study conducted by the Texas A&M University Li-

brary, suggest that little connection exists between the perceived value of "essential" periodicals and the actual use they received during their first year on library shelves.

Libraries also could share periodicals that not all of them subscribe to. But for such resource sharing to work, libraries must establish an effective system by which users can obtain journals from other libraries easily and quickly. Many faculty members oppose resource sharing because borrowing material through current interlibrary-loan systems takes too much time and is inconvenient. Any proposal to cancel little-used journals must be accompanied by a timely, efficient document-retrieval and delivery system for periodicals no longer received on campus. The obstacles to efficient interlibrary lending are more administrative and procedural than technological; they could be resolved if libraries were willing to give these systems a high priority.

Eventually, electronic communication will play a more important role in how research is disseminated. But a transition

from print to electronic media will not gain much momentum until universities and professional organizations become convinced that they can save money by producing and disseminating scientific, technical, and medical information themselves. In the short term, in spite of the existence of technology that scans, digitizes, and reproduces materials on demand, we are still very much at the mercy of major American and European publishers.

HIGHER-EDUCATION administrators, increasingly hard-pressed to make ends meet, cannot continue to expand library budgets to keep pace with the continuing spiral of journal prices. And while faculty members continue to oppose canceling subscriptions, even some of them are tiring of the annual ritual of defending the library's budget.

What would happen if librarians were given final, unequivocal authority to cancel a journal subscription? Too many publishers know that librarians are under pressure to respond to faculty recommendations; even librarians with authority to cancel subscriptions usually base their decisions on what the most vocal faculty members will accept, rather than on which periodicals are consulted most. Librarians can scream all they want, but publishers know there sometimes is no power behind the punch.

Campus administrators should give librarians clear and direct authority to cancel subscriptions on the basis of actual use of a journal, once effective and prompt interlibrary delivery systems are in place. Librarians should be the ones making such hard decisions, not faculty members or administrators; it is librarians who must exercise judgment on how to develop and maintain collections and enhance their utility.

Librarians can no longer be generous with their funds; strained budgets have deprived us of this luxury. We must begin to use the research we have conducted on journal use to make some hard choices. In making them, we can improve the performance of our libraries and maybe even force some publishers to rethink their pricing policies.

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Title	Call No.	Publisher	Dept	HSL	Usage		Freq	Price	Price	%	Price	%	Rank	Rank
				Owns	Per	Micro		88/89(89)	89/90(90)	Inc.	90/91(91)	Inc.	88/89	90/91
AA FILM ANNALS OF THE ARCHITECTURAL ASNA 1 A1 A22		AA	ART	N	2	NS	TA	\$60	\$70	16.67%	\$88	25.29%		
ABITARE	OVERSIZE NK 1700 A24	EditriceASege	ART	N	51	NS	M	\$85	\$85	0.00%	\$85	0.00%		
AFTERIMAGE	OVERSIZE TR 640 A2	YSW	ART	N	18	NS	M	\$60	\$38	-37.50%	\$30	-20.00%		
AMERICAN ART JOURNAL (NEW YORK, N.Y.: 196	N 6505 A618	KennedyG	ART	N	11	1	Q	\$33	\$33	-1.52%	\$33	0.00%		
AMERICAN ARTIST	705 AM35	BPIC	ART	N	57	1	M	\$30	\$30	0.00%	\$31	3.33%		
AMERICAN CERAMICS	NK 4005 A46	HarryDennis	ART	N	48	NS	Q	\$24	\$28	16.67%	\$28	0.00%		
AMERICAN CRAFT	OVERSIZE NK 1 C73	ACC	ART	N	42	NS	BM	\$33	\$38	15.15%	\$38	0.00%		
AMERICAN JOURNAL OF ART THERAPY	RC 489 A7 B8	VermColNorU	ART	N	22	4	Q	\$45	\$40	-11.11%	\$45	12.50%		
AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHER	TR 1 A568	DCI	ART	N	114	1	M	\$18	\$18	0.00%	\$18	0.00%		
APOLLO. JOURNAL OF THE ARTS	q700.5 Ap43	Apollo	ART	N	92	2	M	\$98	\$112	14.29%	\$112	0.00%		
ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW. A MAGAZINE OF AR	720.5 AR25	MBCL	ART	N	86	NS	M	\$114	\$114	0.00%	\$114	0.00%		
ARCHIVES OF AMERICAN ART. JOURNAL	709.7305 D484J	SIAAA	ART	N	15	NS	Q	\$65	\$65	0.00%	NPR			
ART AND DESIGN	NX 1 A772x	AGL	ART	N	14	NS	BM	\$75	\$75	0.00%	NPR			
ART BULLETIN	705 C686	CAA	ART	N	7	NS	Q	\$33	\$33	1.00%	\$42	26.01%		
ART CRITICISM	N 7475 A77x	SUofNYStoney	ART	N	26	NS	TA	\$15	\$15	0.00%	NPR			
ART DIRECTION	NC 997 A1 A684	ATPI	ART	N	57	NS	M	\$47	\$54	14.89%	\$75	38.89%		
ART EDUCATION	707 AR751	NAEA	ART	N	39	40	BM	\$27	\$25	-7.41%	\$25	0.00%		
ART IN AMERICA (NEW YORK, N.Y.: 1939)	OVERSIZE N 1 A43	BrantArtPI	ART	N	166	7	M	\$30	\$30	0.00%	\$30	0.00%		
ART INTERNATIONAL	N 1 A1 A7	AP	ART	N	108	NS	Q	\$85	\$85	0.00%	\$92	8.24%		
ART JOURNAL	705 AR756	CAS	ART	N	28	4	Q	\$33	\$33	0.00%	\$42	27.27%		
ART NEWS	q705 Ar755	ANS	ART	N	76	28	M	\$27	\$27	0.00%	\$27	0.00%		
ARTFORUM	705 AR759	Artforum	ART	N	68	NS	M	\$20	\$26	30.00%	\$29	11.54%		
ARTIST	N 1 A815	APCL	ART	N	24	NS	MO	\$44	\$44	0.00%	\$44	0.00%		
ARTS MAGAZINE	q705 Ar752	ACG	ART	N	74	NS	M	\$31	\$31	0.00%	\$31	0.00%		
BULLETIN MONUMENTAL, PUBLIE SOUS LES A	705 B874	SocFraDar	ART	N	12	NS	Q	\$51	\$53	3.92%	\$71	33.96%		
BURLINGTON MAGAZINE	OVERSIZE N 1 B95	BMPLTD	ART	N	34	NS	M	\$240	\$300	25.00%	\$285	-5.00%		
CASABELLA	NA 4 C3	EPSRL	ART	N	12	NS	MO	\$160	\$160	0.00%	\$190	18.75%		
CERAMICS MONTHLY	TP 785 C44	PP	ART	N	70	2	M	\$23	\$25	8.70%	\$25	0.00%		
COLOR RESEARCH AND APPLICATION	QC 494 C63	JohnWiley	ART	N	66	NS	BM	\$170	\$155	-8.82%	\$165	6.45%		
COMMUNICATION ARTS	NC 997 A1 C2	Coyne&Blanch	ART	N	145	NS	M	\$42	\$48	14.29%	\$48	0.00%		
CREATIVE BLACK BOOK	HF 5805 C7x	Friendly	ART	N	NS	NS	A	\$114	NPR		NPR			

1-29-91
Faculty Senate
Meeting

Timetable for Journal Review Process
Spring Semester, 1991

January 28-29	Library sends departmental journal list to library representatives.
February 22	Library representatives return departmental journal lists with priority rankings.
February 25-March 8	Library staff adds new rankings to lists.
March 8	Library sends alphabetical lists and lists in order by rank of all journals to library representatives for review..
March 28	Library representatives return lists with any recommendations for changes in rankings.
March 28-April 12	Library staff reconciles differences of opinions on rankings.
April 12	Library sends revised lists to library representatives for final review.
April 22	Library representatives return final revised list to library.

The library will send informational memos to deans and department chairpersons throughout the process but will send journal lists only to library representatives.