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ARTICLES

Leaving the "Big Deal" . . . Five Years Later

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Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) and the University of Oregon each withdrew from several Big Deals with major commercial journal publishers from 2008 to 2010. Analysis of the impact of these decisions was originally conducted and reported in 2011 and 2012. This article provides updated analysis based on interlibrary loan statistics, financial savings, and impact on the collections. Results show that interlibrary loan of lost content still represents a small fraction of prior use, savings have been considerable, and the libraries have been able to address other needs in their collections because of the decision to withdraw.

KEYWORDS *Big Deals, serials inflation, vendor negotiations, interlibrary loan, usage statistics*

Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) and the University of Oregon (UO) engaged in a "Big Deal" de-selection in 2008–2010, and have previously presented the initial results of that in several venues, including presentations at the American Library Association (ALA) annual meeting in June 2012,[1] the ALA Midwinter meeting in January 2012, and the NASIG meeting in June 2011.[2] This article directly follows up that NASIG meeting's proceedings, published in *The Serials Librarian*, vol. 62, nos. 1–4, published in 2012.

Since the departure from the "Big Deals," we have had five years of budgeting, purchasing, and statistics gathering that can add some clarity to

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the consequences to the decisions to leave made half a decade ago, and can see both the benefits and the limits to the benefits due to the dismantling of those deals.

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY CARBONDALE

Background

SIUC is classified as a Carnegie high research university, and is part of the Southern Illinois University system, which includes a Medical School, a Law School, and a sister campus, SIU Edwardsville. SIUC offers 32 doctoral and professional programs and 75 Master's programs. Total student enrollment for SIUC is just over 20,000. Morris Library is an Association of Research Libraries (ARL) library, holds 2.9 million volumes, and has a collection budget of $5.2 million.

Morris Library and the "Big Deals"

SIUC's Morris Library ended three "Big Deals" in 2009 and 2010. These were agreements with Springer and Wiley, via the Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA), and Elsevier, with Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE). While of obvious benefit to the SIUC community, these agreements exerted excessive pressure on the library materials budget. Unwilling and unable to continue them, we cancelled the agreements and negotiated new licenses as an individual institution.

The focus of this study comprises two key areas of impact: interlibrary loan and the materials budget. Because the data is cleanest and most comprehensive for Wiley, analysis of interlibrary loan data is restricted to this publisher. Materials budget data are aggregated for the three publishers, to measure the impact as a whole of our decision to discontinue participation in the "Big Deals."

Measuring Impact: Interlibrary Loan

Interlibrary loans from titles previously available in the "Big Deal" but not included in our subscriptions (nonsubscribed titles) is an indicator of the authentic demand for these titles and hence the true value of the "Big Deal." Requests for articles by interlibrary loan (ILL) require some effort on the part of the faculty or student and incur some delay. While neither are onerous, they do serve as a brake on incidental or accidental use of content, and demonstrate a level of need that is not inherent in a download statistic. Download statistics are heavily relied upon by the profession but continue to be problematic in many ways.[3] The question of their relation to actual value remains unanswered, and comparison with interlibrary loan data illuminates that relationship. Unfortunately, it is only possible when titles have been cancelled or otherwise lost.

As mentioned, Wiley provides the cleanest analysis possible for SIUC. As reported in the original study, the SIUC community lost access to 597 titles from Wiley. There were 11,254 downloads for the 597 lost titles in the year prior to the end of the “Big Deal.” In the original study, 62% of the nonsubscribed titles had received one or fewer downloads per month. Further, 10% of these titles had no downloads during that year. These numbers alone demonstrate the limited value of the “Big Deal” for the SIUC community. Even so, they exaggerate that value, due to the ambiguity of download statistics. Accurate assessment of value requires other metrics, including interlibrary loan requests for lost content.

At the time of the original study, conducted one year after access to nonsubscribed titles was lost, only one year of content was available for ILL requests, since we maintained archival access to the nonsubscribed titles for the years in which we were participating members of the “Big Deal” (and still do). A reasonable question about the data at the time was the extent to which this limited supply of content of potential interest affected the validity of the study. However, we now have results from a larger time span, since the last five years of content for our nonsubscribed titles were unavailable to our users except via ILL. If anything, the results are even more convincing.

In the original study conducted in 2011, the top 25% of nonsubscribed Wiley titles, determined by the number of downloads in the prior year, were examined in order to assess the impact of departure on ILL. For the present study, analysis was extended to include all 597 titles. At the time of the original study, 27% of the Wiley titles analyzed had at least one ILL request in the year following departure. For the five year period, this number of one request per year increased to 32% of the lost titles. Thus for the five year period over two-thirds of the titles failed to generate as much as one request per year. None averaged as much as one per month; in fact the highest rate was 9.4 per year, and only one other title averaged more than 6 requests per year. Of the titles, 283 (47%) had no ILL requests over the five year period, even though there were a reported 2,361 downloads from those journals in the year prior to departure. In total, there were 1,118 ILL requests for all the titles, which had received 11,254 downloads in the year prior to departure. Interlibrary loan demand over a five year period was thus 10% of prior use.

It was expected that the number of ILLs would increase annually as additional journal issues are published, and this is indeed the case. The number of ILL requests increased from 104 in 2010 to 297 in 2014. The number of unique titles with at least one request in any calendar year peaked in the third year at 150, or 25% of the total available titles, and declined slightly to 145 in 2013 and to 141 in 2014. In other words, in any given year, at least 75% of the nonsubscribed journals showed no demand from the SIUC community.

Overall, demand for content from nonsubscribed journals previously available via the "Big Deal" is significantly less than what analysis of pre-departure download numbers indicated, and certainly less than the typical thresholds used by academic libraries to determine if a title should be on subscription. The demand is present, but not at high enough levels to contraindicate the fiscal soundness of the decision to leave five years ago.

Measuring Impact: The Budget

Turning to a more positive aspect of "Big Deal" departure, the impact on the budget has been significant. Here it is possible to extend the analysis to the three dropped "Big Deals": Elsevier, Springer, and Wiley. Beginning with actual costs for Springer in 2008 and Elsevier and Wiley in 2009 (we left the Springer deal a year earlier than the other two), and projecting a 5% annual increase for each package, the amount we would have paid in 2015 had we continued our "Big Deal" participation is $2,694,000. The amount actually paid to these publishers for 2015 was $2,268,000. The difference between projected and actual costs is thus $426,000. This amount exceeds Morris Library's monograph budget for the year. Instead of consuming 43% of our budget, our actual commitment for 2015, the three packages would have consumed 51%. Assuming 4% increases, the difference would have been $271,000, still over 65% of our monograph budget for FY15, and totaling 49% of our overall budget.

Similar savings were realized each year (see Table 1). The amount saved varies, depending on the terms of the agreements we negotiated with the publishers for any given year. In total, over the six years from 2010 through 2015, a 5% projected increase shows savings of over $2 million; a 4% increase shows savings of almost $1.7 million. To put this in perspective, in case it is needed, over these six years we were able to purchase between 18,000 to 22,000 books we could not have had we remained in the "Big Deals."[4]

TABLE 1 Difference between Actual and Projected Payments with 5% and 4% Increases

Year	Savings vs projected 5% annual increase		Savings vs projected 4% annual increase	
2010	$	340,130	$	315,947
2011	$	348,687	$	302,425
2012	$	338,521	$	268,242
2013	$	338,897	$	242,535
2014	$	383,092	$	258,433
2015	$	426,396	$	271,090
Total	$	2,175,396	$	1,658,670

Measuring Impact: The Collection

The savings described above have obvious implications for collection development. There are advantages realized in terms of diversification of the collection with respect to content, format, subject matter, and audience. The example of the additional number of books we were able to purchase is an illustration only; the money could have been (and partially was) spent for other resources, including other journals. Beyond the savings already realized and the additional materials already acquired, the advantages can be projected forward, not only because of the annual savings, but because we maintain the flexibility to reduce our exposure to these publishers as necessary or desired.

Conclusion

The financial implications of leaving "Big Deals" are easily measured and speak for themselves. The impacts on the collection and the autonomy of the library are also clear and self-evident. Interlibrary loan analysis shows that demand as determined by download statistics is deceptive and that only a small percentage of that purported demand translates into ILL requests. Five years post-departure, we remain convinced that ending our participation was the correct decision.

THE UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

The University of Oregon is classified as a Carnegie very high research university, and is a member of the Association of American Universities (AAU), and the ARL. Our primary consortium is the Orbis-Cascade Alliance, a group of 37 academic libraries of all types in the Pacific Northwest, augmented by our membership in the GWLA, which consists of 35 academic research libraries, primarily in the West and Midwest. UO was a member of the Oregon University System (OUS) until mid-2014, which at the time consisted of seven of the eight public universities in Oregon, when it administratively separated from the OUS, and began governing itself autonomously.

UO has a student body consisting of 23,925 full-time equivalten (FTE) students, including 3,734 graduate students and 20,191 undergraduates. There are about 2,066 faculty members. In 2013, 5,887 degrees were awarded, including 169 doctorates, 149 law degrees, 949 Master's degrees, and 4,620 Bachelor's degrees.

The UO Libraries, which consist of the Knight Library, and seven satellite libraries in Eugene, Portland, and Charleston, Oregon, had a 2014 annual budget of $26,137,258, of which $7,547,486 was spent on collections, or on access to electronic materials. There are 3,245,882 volumes in our collection.

Recap of 2008–2009

The UO Libraries found itself to be dealing with a two-pronged assault on its budget in 2008–2009. The first prong was the result of the end of savings from the last serials cancellation project in 2004–2005. That, and the previous three organized cancellations saved the UO Libraries $1.49 million in its materials budget. The UO Libraries was subsequently able to coast on those collective savings for about three to four years.

The second prong was the general financial downturn that occurred in that timeframe, causing major cuts in state expenditures and in the returns from investments that the university had. As a result, there was an initial 20% cut to our budget (later, somewhat mitigated by augments and exemptions granted by the provost's office). Nonetheless, we found ourselves in a difficult financial spot, and had to make some difficult choices about how to pare our budget, and how to pay our bills. Making cuts to titles that were not tied up in big publisher packages would not achieve the savings that we needed to make in order to balance our budget, so we were forced to examine some of our "Big Deal" packages.

Because of budget calendars and timing, some were not good candidates to be cut that year, but we eventually settled on two packages to take action on: Elsevier and Wiley.

The Elsevier package had been previously procured via the Orbis Cascade Alliance. We, along with Oregon State University (OSU) and Portland State University (PSU), left that deal, and collectively entered into a new mini-arrangement with Elsevier that significantly cut our titles, and our costs, resulting in an 11% reduction in dollars spent on Elsevier, while additionally maintaining access to a group of well-used non-subscribed titles in a unique title list (UTL).

We additionally cut our Wiley deal completely, and started using the euphemistically titled "enhanced access license" with them, which in fact actually meant that we were only purchasing individual subscriptions at retail cost, rather than as a package. Although this meant the cost of individual titles went up, it gave us more flexibility in paring titles, and saved us close to $200,000 in the initial year of the cut.

In all, the cuts we made to these two big packages enabled us to forego any large serials cuts for the last six years, and possibly seven. So, where are we now?

Budget Impact Since 2009

The main impact was that the "Big Deal" cuts enabled us to slow the inflationary increases that we had been seeing. Our collections budget has since seen only moderate increases, but this, combined with the carry-forward and reduced spending from the 2009 cuts, enabled us to maintain a fairly stable

TABLE 2 University of Oregon Collection Budgets, 2009–2015

Year	Collections budget
2009 (Pre-cuts)	$6,828,085.00
2010	$6,453,914.00
2011	$6,427,158.00
2012	$6,619,102.00
2013	$6,959,612.00
2014	$7,469,634.00
2015	$7,547,486.00

collection of electronic journals; to not have to make major monographs cuts; and to even strategically add new electronic journals and databases to support existing and emerging research areas on campus (Table 2).

The 2015 budget year is still being played out as of this writing, and it is unknown if we will be able to squeak through without making at least some cuts around the edges. We are expecting budget augments from the provost office, but as of now, it is unknown if these will cover the inflationary shortfall that finally caught up with us this year.

We are expecting to have to engage in some sort of serials cancellation project in the 2016 budget year, but the size and shape of that will remain unknown, until we enter the next fiscal year and have some clarity on our programmed budget.

Wiley

There have been no notable changes in our arrangements with John Wiley & Sons. Occasionally, the UO Libraries have added a journal title or two to our collection with them (as well as publisher titles moving in and out of the Wiley collection), but when we do, it is done so as an individual subscription, and there is no additional buy-in for us in terms of a larger deal. On the whole, our Wiley titles get used less than our Elsevier titles, and the cuts that we made in 2009 resulted in no known negative faculty or student reaction either then, or since. Our Wiley costs are shown in Table 3.

Elsevier

The re-working of our Elsevier deal with OSU and PSU has been a particularly notable success story for us. We achieved significant long-term cost savings, stabilized a low inflation rate with them, forged a happy cooperative relationship with the two other multidisciplinary Tier 1 and Tier 2 research universities in the state, and maintained a good relationship with the vendor as well.

TABLE 3 University of Oregon: Wiley Expenditures and Usage, 2009–2016

Year	# titles	Spend	Usage
2009 (Pre-cuts)	~1,000.00	$519,616.00	(No longer available)
2010	297	$351,567.02	44,898
2011	297	$379,315.03	56,201
2012	329	$424,577.50	54,062
2013	328	$445,415.50	97,555
2014	301	$487,477.64	84,360
2015	299	$509,224.47	N/A
2016 (Estimated)	300	$539,777.94	N/A

Our usage with Elsevier has remained robust, resulting in an excellent cost-per-use calculation, and we have added several new titles to our deal. While these have cut into the long-term savings that we achieved with this deal, they have been well-used, and appear to be solid additions (Table 4).

The initial Elsevier deal that we entered into in 2009 was only for two years. The three schools at the time felt very uncertain about the trajectory of the economy, and of our budgets, so they collectively opted to take a more conservative route, and make it a short-duration contract.

When the initial two-year deal expired in 2011, the economy was rosier and budgets were more stable. In addition, Elsevier offered us a favorable inflationary increase if we opted for a longer contract for the first renewal period. And in fact, Elsevier asked for a seven-year contract; however, the three schools thought that any deal that took us out beyond five years would be too risky and would have too many financial unknowns, so we opted for a five-year deal instead.

This was probably a good call, because now, at the end of the five-year second contract, the budgetary waters are looking choppy again, and we may need some additional flexibility as we move forward.

As of the time of the writing of this article (April 2015), the three schools are again preparing to re-enter negotiations with Elsevier for another

TABLE 4 University of Oregon: Elsevier Expenditures and Usage, 2009–2015

Year	# titles	Spend	Usage
2009 (Pre-cuts)	575	$413,887.21	140,757
2010	162	$370,836.50	140,705
2011	176	$381,961.60	153,349
2012	181	$403,001.65	172,087
2013	188	$419,121.71	175,090
2014	188	$440,077.80	209,960
2015	188	$462,081.69	N/A

Note. The Unique Title List also includes access to ~400 UTL titles.

contract. All three schools are feeling budgetary pressures in some way, so at least some cutbacks are likely. It is also uncertain how long of a contract that we will opt for. A new three-year contract may be more palatable to us in the current climate, rather than another five-year agreement.

We gave some thought to adding the only other research university in the state to our negotiations (Oregon Health & Science University, a Carnegie special focus institution/medical school), but they were on a different renewal schedule that did not mesh with what we were trying to do, and their singular focus on medicine and human biology may have introduced some additional variables that may have made our negotiations more difficult.

We currently expect to start negotiations shortly, and to have a new deal, of whatever configuration, ready by the end of summer, and have it able to go into effect in January 2016.

Conclusions

Like SIUC, we are also pleased with the end results of our "Big Deal" trimming. It gave us several stable years of collections budgets, without significantly affecting the research efforts on campus. We continue to regard the savings as significant, the effort as ground-breaking and new-template-creating, and we remain prepared to follow this route again, if the budget climate dictates it.

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