

Library Policy Committee

Report on the Impact of BRC Recommendations

May, 2011

The Library Committee conducted a survey of the campus community on the impact and implementation of the BRC (Blue Ribbon Committee on the Library) recommendations. The purpose of the survey was to collect feedback from the campus on the cost saving measures enacted from the BRC recommendations. This survey may not be statistically valid, however it does give some indication of campus views. For the full survey reports see the following url:

<http://www.umbc.edu/provost/planning/LibraryServicesSurvey-final41911.pdf>

The following summary of survey responses is grouped into three areas: (1) results of the new serials cancellation process and suggestions for improvement; (2) impact of various service changes/cuts and other economic measures implemented from the BRC recommendations; (3) suggestions for refinement of current ideas and suggestions for new ideas for cost savings and improved services. The survey was developed and presented on the Library website via Survey Monkey from March 28, 2011-April 15, 2011. There were 105 survey responses (35 faculty, 15 staff, 20 graduate students, 35 undergraduate students).

(1) Results with the implementation of the new procedures for making decisions on serials cuts and impact/challenges going forward.

The comments from the survey were generally neutral or positive toward the process. While there was concern raised over cuts in general by respondents, there was little support for changing the process. However, it is very early in the process for the full impact of the cuts to be felt by the campus community. As the year progresses, the campus community may feel more concerned over the cuts. Therefore, the responses to the survey questions can only deal with the implementation issues, but not the impact of the actual cuts. *The Library Policy Committee will continue to monitor this process and the impact of the cuts for the next several years.* The impact on the scholarly operations of the university may not be felt immediately, but over the next few months and years.

A review of the increase in interlibrary loan requests can assist in the assessment of the serials cancellations. If a cancelled journal is requested to the extent that it would be more cost effective to subscribe to the journal rather than using interlibrary loans, then UMBC will need to consider adding the journal back as a subscription. Library staff should monitor increases in the interlibrary loan budget. Several comments in the free text sections noted concern over the continued cancellation of serials and the need to keep access to electronic journals, databases and interlibrary loans.

One issue that may occur as a result of the serials cancellations is the loss of a journal package, due to the need to cancel titles within the package. As outlined in the serials review process, this situation would require a cross college discussion involving all concerned departments.

One response mentioned the concern over continued cutting of library resources in light of the last Middle States recommendation report. This reduction in library resources does not address the deficits noted in that report. It is acknowledged in this tight budget environment that cost savings are necessary, but the long term consequences do need to be monitored.

The Committee recommends that the Library (1) study the effects on interlibrary loans of the subscription cuts of recent years, (2) keep the campus informed of what the data shows, and (3) recommend any revisions in UMBC subscriptions that may be inferred from trends in interlibrary loan requesting. The Committee endorses the subscription decision process which has been implemented, and especially the provision of data on subscriptions by the Library to decision makers during the decision process. The Committee also supports college-wide decision making in cases where cross-departmental issues arise.

(2) Progress and impact on the various service changes/cuts and other economic measures delineated in the BRC recommendations.

The specific changes implemented by the library in response to the BRC recommendations were noted and respondents were asked to respond to each item.

Responses to the items surveyed were:

Reduced hours at the serials desk. The response to the current reduction was neutral to positive.

No staffing in the slide library. The response to the current reduction was neutral to positive.

No library book sales. The response to the current reduction was neutral to somewhat dissatisfied. However, book sales are not central to the Library's mission. The staff costs involved in conducting library book sales are too expensive to continue in the current economic environment. Perhaps, in better economic times they might be reinstated.

Most print journals are no longer bound. The response was generally neutral.

Library closed on Saturdays during summer and winter sessions. This question generated the most dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied and neutral responses (73%) in this section. The Library Policy Committee will review the summer and winter Saturday closings in future meetings.

The section of the survey dealing with tutorials and Wimba instruction sessions were neutral to positive. Those using those services were generally positive about them. Tutorial use was significant enough to indicate that this domain of Library services should be expanded.

The section dealing with charging for lockers and study rooms showed that there would not be a substantive income from implementing these charges. Most respondents were not in favor of this suggestion. It appears from the survey that if the Library charged for lockers and study rooms the net revenue from doing so would be negligible, and therefore not worth the effort.

The Committee notes that the Library cannot meet its BRC cut goals unless it cuts some services which the users say they want or finds other services to cut.

(3) Suggestions for refinements to the current ideas and development of additional new ideas for future consideration.

The survey polled respondents on possible additional cost saving ideas including reduced availability of interlibrary loans and reduced service desk hours. The following were responses to these suggestions:

1. Reduce availability of free interlibrary loans - resoundingly negative
2. Reduced circulation desk hours - somewhat negative
3. Reduced library media desk hours - neutral
4. Reduced serials desk hours - neutral to satisfied
5. Reduced reference desk hours - neutral to satisfied
6. Reduced security desk hours - neutral to dissatisfied

Free text responses for additional costs savings generated the following ideas:

There were several responses to various energy saving measures, however the library believes it has completed all of the energy saving measures possible.

There were some very concerned responses asking that the campus maintain access to interlibrary loan services, electronic journals and databases.

There were several responses with suggestions on changes to the arrangement or operation of several of the library service desks.

Several responses mentioned the need for moving to electronic journals and eBooks.

The Committee notes that there has been a trend in UMBC feedback of rejecting several of the original cost saving measures proposed by the BRC. If the Library were not to implement all of the cost savings measures which appear to dissatisfy users, it could not meet the cost cutting goals in the BRC report without identifying additional new cost saving measures. However, few additional new ideas for cost saving measures have emerged. Fortunately, the cut amounts for FY11 and FY12 have been lower than the original BRC report predicted. Therefore, the Committee recommends that cost saving goals from the BRC report be lowered to align with the actual cut amounts in the UMBC budgets.

Looking to the Future

The serials-cutting process recommended by the BRC was implemented during the 2010-2011 Academic year. The general consensus is that the process went smoothly in its first year, and this is corroborated by the responses to the survey. We should keep in mind, however, that the cuts made last year went into effect only in January 2011 and there has not been enough time to gauge their full effect.

In fact, LPC recommends making a clear distinction between the implementation of the cutting process and the adverse effects of journal cutting on the research mission of UMBC. There is already anecdotal evidence that departments found it harder to find suitable journals to cut in during the first phase of the cuts for the next 2011-2012 academic year, with some departments opting to cut from their book budgets instead. The fact that publishers bundle journals in databases complicates the situation considerably. Currently, UMBC has access to some essential journals we don't subscribe to, because they are part of a database we subscribe to (e.g. Springer Verlag database). We are in real danger of losing these journals, because there are very few stand-alone journals left to cut, and most of those are inexpensive journals.

We expect that the journal-cutting process will get progressively more difficult each passing year. LPC recommends that the cutting process and its effects be closely monitored during the next few years. The library liaisons and department chairs are in the front lines of this process, and their opinions could significantly shape the whole process. Consequently, they should be an integral part of the review and survey process starting this year, before we begin the second phase of this year's cut process in September 2011.

To the extent that these cost saving measures become more austere, the LPC will need to work with the campus administration to develop more detailed and targeted surveys to assess the impact on the campus community.