

Boom or bust**The ups and downs of library collections in Alberta**

by Nadine Hoffman

The University of Calgary is in Alberta, the heart of the oil and gas industry in Canada. Almost 50 percent of the university's revenues come from the provincial government. Significant revenue from oil and natural gas royalties for the Alberta government makes budgeting volatile. This is evidenced by a projected \$8 billion surplus in August 2008 and a \$1 billion projected deficit in February 2009.

The cyclical nature of Alberta's economy and library budgets means collections are tricky to maintain at a constant level. The last bust cycle in the early 1990s led to a 42 percent cut in the library's budget, leading to cancellations of almost half the serial titles.

The past few years saw an increase in our purchasing power due to a boom and the strength of the Canadian dollar. We were able to fill some gaps in our collections; however, our purchasing power dropped significantly when the Canadian dollar decreased by 15 percent in October 2008. Our collections staff moved quickly to ensure renewals to important subscriptions and brought a halt to monograph purchases. These speedy actions will result in a balanced budget.

Next year's budget is uncertain. We anticipate no increase in revenues and likely will see an increase in costs for resources; there may be a need to cancel some serials. We are not over-reacting to the situation. Rather, we see this as an opportunity to reassess priorities for long-term collection development and will balance user needs with content and format.

In short-term and long-term plans, we will assess our must, should, and like to have resources for the future. We need to ensure we will be able to collect our must have resources and strive to acquire should have items; the like to have resources are acquired during boom times. Sometimes we can fill gaps in library collections later.

Life is never boring in Alberta. We have been through downturns before. We roll with the punches caused by the ebb and flow of oil and gas prices. While the near future may be difficult, we have survived busts before and we will survive having gained experience from the past.

Have you or colleagues responded to the economic crunch in ways that other LPSSers could apply themselves? Share your first-hand stories in the News, the LPSS listserv, or our wiki.

Share your good news, too. Announcements of LPSSers' new jobs, promotions, publications, awards, and so on can encourage the rest of us.

Cultural shifts in academe: ISA talks assessment

by Lucy Lyons

By now, most librarians have heard of the concept of a "culture of assessment" even if its definition remains unclear and its practice, irregular.

In New York City, in February, the program of the 50th Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association (ISA) listed a panel called "Taking the Fear Out of Assessment and Evaluation: Lessons Learned." Much to my utter surprise – and not only because the panel took place at 8:00 am – the room was packed, extra chairs were sought, and about 130 academics attended.

Perhaps this level of interest is due to falling budgets and rising demands for accountability. The speakers also identified growing requirements from official bodies as reasons for greater assessment activity. Assessment plans are now heavier weights in the overall rating of federal grant proposals. And measurable outcomes have been identified by accreditation associations as vital to the evaluation process.

The title of the panel – "Taking the Fear Out" – proved that incorporating assessment into academic departments is much like attempts to incorporate it into libraries. Last August, the politics of assessment and the management of reducing resistance to change were recurring themes at the 2008 Library Assessment Conference, in Seattle, subtitled "Building Effective, Sustainable, Practical Assessment." (See <http://libraryassessment.org/schedule/index.shtml> for details.)

On a positive note, speakers at both events noted that assessment provides an ability to speak the language of administrators, who do not, in any case, know the language of librarianship or of every academic field. As assessment programs in libraries continue to grow, we will be in a better position to react to the needs of academic departments – eg, by quickly providing the quantitative data and qualitative narrative, related to library support of subject fields, for internal program reviews.

It is good to know (judging from the turnout at the ISA panel) that such collaborative work may well be on the increase.

LPSS News
ACRL – American Library Association
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, IL 60611-2795

Nonprofit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
American Library
Association

IN THIS ISSUE

Preliminary LPSS schedule, 2009 ALA Annual	1
LPSS programs APSA preconference	1
Chair’s message: successful virtual meetings	2
V-meeting testimonial	2
LPSS member to know: Lucy Lyons	3
Poli sci prof samples ACRL conference	4
Hard times in Alberta	5
ISA seeks culture of assessment in academe	5
Guidelines for News contributors	6
In review: <i>PolicyFile</i>	7

© 2009 American Library Association
ISSN 0885-7342

LPSS News is a publication of the Law and Political Science Section,
Association of College and Research Libraries, American Library Association,
50 East Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611-2795.

Web: <www.ala.org/acrl/lpss>

Wiki: <wikis.ala.org/acrl/index.php/LPSS>

Contacts:

Editor: Bruce Pencek <bpencek@vt.edu>
University Libraries
Virginia Tech
Blacksburg, VA 24062-9001

Associate Editor: Jodi Shepherd <jrshepherd@csuchico.edu>
Meriam Library
California State University, Chico
Chico, CA 95929-0295