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Colleges Explore Funding for Electronic Course Media

Everyone on campus seems to appreciate electronic course materials. After all, they are easier to distribute than paper coursepacks, and offer more convenient access than traditional library reserves. But mounting costs, including labor and copyright fees for these materials, have forced some college libraries to reconsider who will pay for this convenience in the future.

"We started out with a couple thousand dollars in 1998," said Leah McGinnis Dunn, head of the R.B. House Undergraduate Library at the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill. "Since then, our copyright fees and labor costs have increased dramatically."

Like many academic institutions, UNC does not charge student fees for e-reserves. But it is weighing all of its options for future funding of this increasingly popular service.

"We're constantly trying to think of what we're going to do if it goes up much beyond this year's spending," said Dunn. "We've talked about imposing limits on the number of articles that a particular course or instructor can have on per semester."

UNC is also looking at ways to streamline the e-reserves process for its library staff. "It's a really intensive process for our staff to have to seek these permissions and manage payment for thousands of articles every semester. We've talked about only paying for things that go through Copyright Clearance Center (CCC), so if it's not in CCC's catalog, then we won't do it," said Dunn. "We haven't imposed that yet, but it's certainly something we'd consider to help manage staff time."

When Brigham Young University (BYU) administrators saw their e-reserve usage jump dramatically over the last three years, they too began listing possible alternate funding sources to take pressure off their library budget. "We're looking at making the faculty more aware of the costs being incurred by them for this service, because right now it's a seamless process," said Susie Quartey, associate director of the Copyright Licensing Office at Brigham Young University. "They show up to reserve materials, walk away from it, and don't have any idea necessarily that there are fees being paid."

She shared some of the ideas BYU is exploring. "We've talked about providing a report on a departmental level, listing their usage and allowing them to determine if they want to set limits within their own areas," said Quartey. "Another way is to possibly include this as a student fee. When we calculated it out, it averaged out to only a couple of dollars per student when we consider the entire student body. There's a general university fund we could request permission to tap into for this purpose, because it's such a necessary part of the students' education."

To reduce the amount of staff time required to process e-reserves, BYU developed an automated ordering system. The system allows instructors to place orders online and monitor when their requested material is available. Quartey says that eventually the system will include reporting components to enable her to pull data for annual reports and monitor usage of materials offered through her university's e-reserve program.

Quartey, Dunn and George Mason University Copyright Officer Rosemary Chase all stressed that libraries facing the budget strain of e-reserves need the backing of their college administration. "From the very beginning, we've had support from the upper administration," said Chase. "If you don't have that,

you're really out of luck.”

Chase said her university's e-reserves program has grown gradually over the last eight years and administrators have allocated the necessary funding so far. “I really like the idea that the library covers the costs for whoever decides to take advantage of it. That means that anybody and everybody can use it.”



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