Director’s Message:
‘The Best of Times and the Worst of Times’ in Library Funding

By Kathryn Carpenter

I can always find some comfort in these familiar words. The quotation invokes an influential novel and the enduring artistry of an author whose writing still engages and thrills the reader, centuries after publication. Contemplating “the best” also suggests that, even in the worst of “the worst” times, we have some strengths and resources to draw on, to sustain us, and to advance our progress toward our library goals.

I read many stories recently about health science and general academic library budgets that are grim, unhappy tales of reductions, recessions, shortfalls, and missed opportunities. The Library of the Health Sciences has a similar budget story; all units at the University of Illinois at Chicago have a reduction target for the coming fiscal year. Like other libraries, our expenditures emphasize personnel and information resources, with a small percentage allocated to operational support. The impact of reductions in information subscriptions and licenses and reductions in library staff in all categories will be severe as these cutbacks follow years of belt tightening, reduction of positions by attrition, internal reassignments, and substantial reorganization, as well as journal cancellations and deferred purchases of books.

Yet, as difficult and emotionally wrenching as these changes are to plan and to implement, we can take comfort in another tale of “the best” of times in our library funding, and in the opportunity we have to make real improvements in our services to students. In 2009, UIC students endorsed the adoption of a $200 assessment per semester to enable the library and academic computing to make the improvements that they need to support their academic progress. These monies have enabled LHS to replace furnishings, add computers, including laptops to circulate, upgrade printers, and add to the licensed information resources available to students. The funds have made it possible to refurbish facilities and to enhance the learning environment, including a new classroom. These monies also support extended hours of service. We greatly appreciate the students’ support for the library and are very pleased that we can make real improvements in response to their stated requests with the funds that they provide through their fees.
I am not suggesting that these funds and the opportunities for library improvements that they provide make up for, diminish, or offset how difficult making the difficult decisions and living with them really is for everyone involved, staff and users alike. Rather, we will continue to suffer through the worst budget circumstances and acknowledge the best funding scenarios at the same time, as we are also united in our respect for those who suffer with us and those who support our improvements.

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