Report on "Funding our Digital Future: Budgeting for Libraries and Scholarly Communication," Binghamton University Libraries, March 20 & 21, 2006.

Conference presenters from the intersecting worlds of libraries, publishers, and publishers agents, addressed challenges they faced in the new and continually evolving arena of scholarly communication. In addition, members of Binghamton's teaching faculty responded informally to some of the issues raised. Understandably, no grand solution was discovered, but a number of interesting points were made.

John Meador, Director of Libraries, Binghamton University: instead of complaining about the high cost of serials, librarians should get out of the "big deals" so they can be in a position to select titles based on their real value to their campuses. Even titles priced at $24,000/year may be worth the cost for its highly specialized readers. However, a campus should receive discounts for journals which include many articles by researchers from that campus, and authors should retain copyright, license their work to publishers, and submit their publications to open access repositories.

Stephen Roberts, Acting Associate Vice President for Libraries, University of Buffalo: Buffalo is spending $3.7 million on e-resources, more than 50% of their total materials budget. They receive 50% of the $600/year student tech feel Buffalo charges.

Suzanne Thorin, university librarian and dean of the library at Syracuse University: At Syracuse, she tried to instigate new approaches by having her staff look at some environmental scans that had been done (e.g., OCLC's) and other revelatory information, such as the fact that half of Harvard's collections are now in storage. She believes that some of librarianships most sacred cows need to be examined with such intentionally provocative questions such "when will cataloging end? is the MARC record dead? why not just use OCLC records? why review approval plan books—aren't there better uses of our time?"

Kathryn Rutz, Vice-President for Editorial Development, Haworth Press: most interesting item in her talk: library budgets are decreasing as a percentage of institutional budgets.

Ray Abruzzi, Associate Product Manager for Academic, Public and Research Libraries at Thomson Gale: very interesting presentation of how a publisher such as Thomson undertakes a major digitization project, in this case, the 19th Century American Newspaper Project. The project needs to be defined and developed within publishers' and libraries' cost constraints. These constraints immediately lead to the realization that it's not feasible to digitize everything; instead, a panel of experts is set up to select material for digitization. The Newspaper Project will include 1.5 million pages from 200 newspapers. Estimated cost per page for digitizing and formatting is $1.75, which does not include other costs. Thomson plans to amortize these costs over a 10-year period. They will offer the contents on a purchase in addition to a subscription model. Purchase cost will equal five years of subscription cost.

Karen Schmidt, Associate University Librarian for Collections and Professor of Library Administration at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign: Described long and difficult process of reallocating funds for selection. Key obstacle to reallocation is the natural feeling of selectors that the amount of their allocation is indicative of how much their organization values them. Over the years, various task forces, committees, meetings, minor reallocations, etc., but they're still struggling. Current goals are to move away from across the board increases; match allocations to campus priorities (very difficult!), and allocate funds for electronic resources. It's possible that working by funds is too restrictive to make required changes and address campus needs. In terms of process, they have moved away from committee decisions because one person needs to make the difficult decisions that can lead to change and be willing to take the heat. At the same time, more information should go out to librarians about the budget; more funds are needed to support interdisciplinary research (defined as crossing over 3 or more funds). Decisions need to be tied to usage, even if they appear radical. For instance, they cancelled Britannica Online for $18,000/year savings.

[Submitted by Nathan Baum, May 7, 2006.]