

# STATISTICS & MEASUREMENT

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## THE IMPACT OF ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING ON TRACKING RESEARCH LIBRARY INVESTMENTS IN SERIALS

by Martha Kyrillidou, Director, Statistics & Service Quality Programs, ARL

The recently published *ARL Statistics 2004–05* reports a decline in the unit cost per serial since 2000, the year when electronic subscriptions were officially included in the serials purchased figures. In 2004–05 the serial unit cost was \$239, close to the 1996–97 unit cost levels. This figure has been on a declining trajectory over the past five years.

Libraries continue to spend more on serials each year, as the average annual percent change in serial expenditures is still above 7% (at a time when the CPI is increasing at an annual rate of about 3%). Serial expenditures for the median ARL library were close to \$6 million last year. The *ARL Statistics 2004–05* shows that about half of the money spent on serials (\$2.8 million) was used to purchase electronic serials and research libraries spent 37.5% of their overall library material budget to purchase electronic resources (\$3.1 million out of a median library materials budget of \$8.6 million).<sup>1</sup>

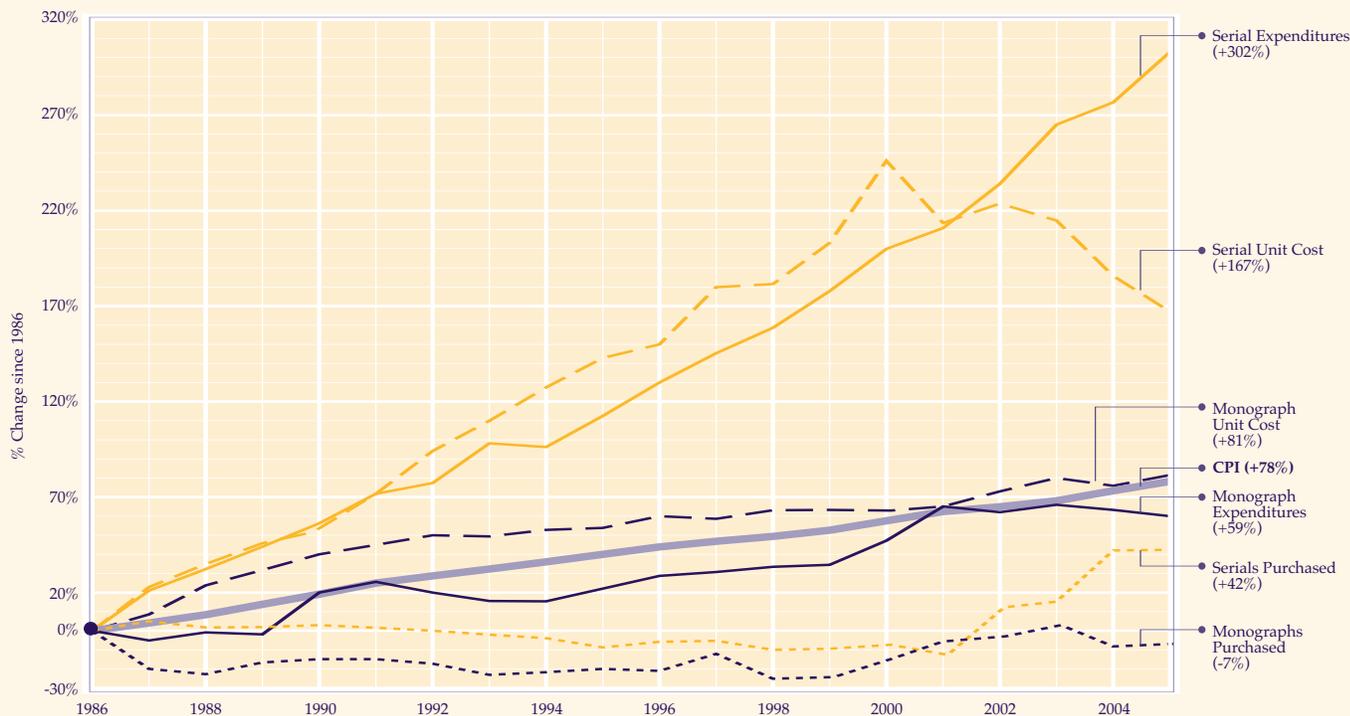
The story of struggling library budgets during the 1990s was told in terms of the “serials crisis.” Serial expenditures and unit costs were increasing much more quickly than inflation for almost two decades, as has

been shown in the *ARL Statistics* (see accompanying graph).

The serials world changed dramatically, though, with the introduction of electronic publishing and the consequent rise in dual-format publishing. During the initial stages of the transition period, some publishers bundled print serials with electronic, some more adventurous souls ventured into entirely new models and products, and quite a few entrepreneurs simply repurposed print to take advantage of the many accessibility features of the electronic world. As a result, libraries now are acquiring access to serials abundantly, some locally but many more through consortia, and an increasing number of serials holdings are electronic and are duplicative of print holdings.

In the same year that ARL began asking libraries to include e-journals in their statistical reporting, the serials unit cost began declining. Had the serials crisis been resolved? Not necessarily. In informal conversations held with some ARL librarians, it seems that a number of factors contributed to this downward trend in the serial unit cost. The inclusion of electronic serials in the counts of serial subscriptions purchased caused a substantial increase in purchased serials—often, for a relatively small addition to the base subscription price. Between 2001 and 2005, purchased serial subscriptions increased by 64%. Some publishers provide access to electronic serials for an additional

MONOGRAPH AND SERIAL COSTS IN ARL LIBRARIES 1986–2005\*



Source: *ARL Statistics 2004–05* (Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, 2006).  
\*Includes electronic resources from 1999–2000 onward.

10–20% surcharge over what a library pays for a print subscription. Following ARL's definition of a serial subscription, journals collected in two formats like this have been counted twice. Furthermore, the elimination of the print subscription may have resulted in discounted subscription fees for the electronic-only title; a library may have access to the electronic-only version of a journal for 90% (or some other fraction) of the print subscription price. Also possibly contributing to the lower serial unit cost are consortial licensing arrangements for electronic journals, where a pooled collection of titles is shared among participating libraries.

Discussions regarding best ways to track research library investment in serials have been posted over the past year on the ARL Survey Coordinators Web page<sup>2</sup> and the ARL Statistics and Measurement program has emphasized collecting data elements regarding electronic resources in practical and meaningful ways.

Given users' preference for electronic serials and the ubiquitous availability of the electronic format, working groups of ARL member library survey coordinators have voiced their preference for shifting ARL's unit of measurement from serial subscriptions to serial titles and recommend reporting these counts in a non-duplicative fashion, i.e., count a title only once even if there are multiple access points to that title as a result of its electronic accessibility.

For more information regarding the annual ARL Statistics data collection, consult the ARL Statistics Web cast held on December 5, 2006; copies are available on CD by request to stats-ra@arl.org.

For more information about the *ARL Statistics* or to download the data files or a PDF of the publication, please visit <http://www.arl.org/stats/arlstat/>. See below to order print copies of the publication.

### Ordering Information

*ARL Statistics 2004–05*

Martha Kyrillidou and Mark Young, comps. and eds.  
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## ARL, UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA LIBRARY, AND UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON LIBRARIES COSPONSOR LIBRARY ASSESSMENT CONFERENCE

by Richard Groves, Customer Relations Coordinator,  
Statistics & Measurement, ARL

**A**RL, the University of Virginia Library, and the University of Washington Libraries cosponsored the Library Assessment Conference: Building Effective, Sustainable, Practical Assessment, held in Charlottesville, Virginia, September 25–27, 2006.

The conference brought together more than 200 participants from 36 US states and 8 countries. The attendees—representing 109 libraries, associations, library systems, and vendors—participated in more than 40 paper and panel sessions. The conference also featured 20 poster presentations and 3 plenary sessions on the topics of “Library Performance Measures That Matter,” “Changing User Needs and Perceptions,” and “Organizational Diversity and Climate Assessment.”

Outside the parallel, poster, and plenary sessions the Library Assessment Conference featured workshops, a special tour of Monticello and the Jefferson Library, and a reception held at the University of Virginia Harrison Institute/Small Special Collections Library.

Those not able to attend the conference may download presentations and handouts from the conference Web site.<sup>1</sup> ARL will publish conference proceedings in 2007 and distribute copies to all conference registrants. Copies will also be available for purchase from ARL.

With the generous help of Stephanie Wright of the University of Washington, ARL has added a library assessment blog<sup>2</sup> to its collection of tools to help build the culture of assessment in libraries. The blog is aimed at assessment librarians and others interested in building effective, sustainable, and practical assessment.

The next Library Assessment Conference will be held at the University of Washington in Seattle, August 4–6, 2008.

### Library Assessment Conference Planning Committee

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.arl.org/stats/laconf/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://libraryassessment.info/>

<sup>1</sup> Martha Kyrillidou and Mark Young, comps. and eds., *ARL Statistics 2004–05* (Washington, DC: ARL, 2006): 21.

<sup>2</sup> See summaries of discussions held on January 20, 2006, and June 23, 2006, [http://www.arl.org/stats/arlstat/coord\\_mtgs.html](http://www.arl.org/stats/arlstat/coord_mtgs.html).