

FROM THE EDITOR

JOURNAL COST CRISIS

Seemingly, every week a new crisis pushes itself into the headlines, or at least into the interdepartmental memos that deluge us in the academic realm. Most universities in the US are undergoing budgetary re-evaluation, downsizing, consolidation, or simply trimming. (Administrators are very good at creative euphemization.) One recent memo concerned the fact that our Science and Engineering Library is considering solving its budgetary problems by cancelling subscriptions to selected journals. In our case, fortunately, the library will consult with users before making these decisions. Nevertheless, they have supplied a list of journals that, if deleted, would ease their budgetary problems. On this list were subscription costs, trends in subscription costs in the past two years, cost per page and a number called the "ISI Impact Index", which attempts to gauge the value of the journal in terms of citations of its articles in subsequent publications. The librarians will rely on several criteria of journal retention, including testimony from individuals and departments verifying value of and dependence on specific journals.

It is instructive to peruse this "hit list" and learn how much many geologically oriented journals have increased their prices, without significantly increasing their number of pages. I especially noted a few journals that most of us in the geological sciences would consider mainline, high-profile and essential for the library to retain. One outlier increased subscription rates 487% in two years, another 261%, a third, 147%. Then the curve started leveling off with several clustered around 100%, and a large group in the 66 to 33% range. The physics journals showed a similar curve. Roughly one-half of the journals on the complete list of geology and physics serials to which our library subscribes have increased their subscription prices more than 20% in the past two years, well ahead of inflation. No doubt some of these will be dropped. I suspect that other science libraries are going through the same processes as ours.

One does not need remarkable prescience to construct a plausible scenario for the outcome of this. Based on the principle that libraries are multi-user entities with institutional support, most journals charge higher prices for library subscriptions than for individual subscriptions. Consequently, many journals, including this one, depend strongly on library subscriptions for support. As libraries drop subscriptions, some journals will cease to exist. The librarians' rationale that "if we drop this journal, you can still get it on interlibrary loan" may not hold for some journals in the future. We may experience a pruning of some of the financially weak journals. "We have too many specialty journals, anyway", some say. Authors in need of publications may not suffer, however, but they may not be able to publish in the journal that targets the most appropriate readership.

Another change that we observe is the digitization of scientific publications. Some journals offer CD-ROMs of one year's worth of journal issues. At present, only the largest (in size and subscriptions) can afford this, and the CD-ROM is available only at the end of the year. These are no cheaper than the paper version, but have the advantages of compact storage and remote computer access. The extreme case of digitization is represented by the few journals already published entirely electronically - no paper . . . unless you make a copy from your PC or work station.

As yet, *RADIOCARBON* has no firm plans for either a CD-ROM version or for electronic publishing. Like most journals, we depend greatly on library subscriptions. Our subscription prices have increased only 16% over the past two years. In 1990, our page area increased 30%, when we

enlarged our book size. We hope that you will discourage your local library from pushing the "delete" key on this journal.

ANOTHER CALIBRATION DISK

As all who have written computer codes know, errors in software occur. Some are obvious; others are insidiously elusive, appearing only under certain circumstances and manifesting themselves subtly. The latter was the case for CALIB v. 3.0. Thus, the insert in the current issue of *RADIOCARBON*. CALIB v. 3.0.3 is the updated version; please erase the previous version and replace it with this one. The authors regret the inconvenience.

Austin Long