How State Budget Cuts Affect the University Libraries
An Interview with Dean Rosann Bazirjian

Q: Rosann, we want to talk about the impact of the state budget cuts on the University Libraries at UNCG. First, how big are the cuts?
RB: As with all of the other units within Academic Affairs, we have been asked to reduce our budget by 15.98% ($1,842,441). In addition, we have been asked to reduce an additional $156,110, representing a negative enrollment change. Our grand total cut is $1,998,551.

Q: Where are the cuts coming from?
RB: The biggest impact to our students and faculty will be on the materials budget—books, journals and electronic resources. The cut means fewer books, fewer journals and fewer databases. Altogether, we are cutting about 1.2 million dollars, or 26% of our materials budget as compared to last year. We are also losing two positions that are vacant, and have moved to a 5-year replacement cycle for PCs. Students and faculty will probably notice most the reduction in the number of new books that we acquire, and that will happen very soon.

Q: You were able to save some areas from cutting. What are the bright spots?
RB: We have protected our student worker budget so far. Not only are our student workers critical in helping us provide services, we are a major employer of students on campus, and we know how important those jobs are in retaining students who might otherwise have to drop out for financial reasons. We’re also keeping our 24/5 schedule for now. Students use that service a lot. During late night hours before and during exams, for example, we have hundreds of students studying in Jackson Library. It’s a very popular service that we are already running as inexpensively as we can, using minimal staff.

Q: How are you deciding what to cut?
RB: The cuts in our materials budget are being developed by our liaisons and our collection management committee. Our liaisons for each discipline are consulting with appropriate faculty in their departments as much as they can in developing our plans. No one wants to cut, but it is something that has to be done. We will also reduce expenditures for equipment, furniture, services, and travel.

Q: You are repurposing some staff positions.
RB: Yes we are. With these kinds of cuts in the materials budget, we won’t buy as much, and we are moving several people in the areas most affected by those reductions into high growth areas.

Q: How did you identify those growth areas?
RB: We looked at the needs of the University and trends affecting academic libraries and our own library in particular. We saw areas where demand is decreasing, and decided to go ahead and move people laterally, but into areas that are new for them, to support trends where demand is increasing. We have really good people working in our libraries, and we want to continue to employ them and give them opportunities to grow. So our repurposing is being driven not only by budget cuts, but by looking closely at trends, needs, and future directions in library services.

Q: What areas are growing?
RB: Our digital projects, special collections and university archives, and electronic resources and information technology units are all growing. All have a need for people to meet that demand.

Q: I understand you are employing some different strategies to keep costs low.
RB: Yes, we are, and we were doing this anyway. One example is something called patron-initiated acquisition for e-books. Our trends show that e-book use is growing, and we are buying more of them than we did a few years ago, even with the cuts. With this procedure, however, e-books from certain suppliers appear in our catalog, but are not actively acquired until a patron asks for them. Essentially, this is an example of just-in-time purchasing that means we buy only when someone needs the e-book. To the patron, the acquisition is instant and transparent, but we don’t buy what isn’t being asked for. Even then, the first use is free, and the purchase is only made on the second use.

Q: What can we, as patrons, do to help?
RB: You can be informed about our cuts. Let others know how much you value the libraries and our services. Bear with us. We are trying to make the best of a tough situation, and hoping as you are that by next year we will all be living in a sounder economy. In the meantime, consider giving financial support to the libraries. Gifts or endowments to support various projects or collections in subject areas that you care about may make the difference between having some resources and services and not having them.