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The development and application of a unique percentage-based allocations formula at the University of Windsor

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ABSTRACT

This article summarizes the literature concerning allocation formulas and outlines the development and application of a percentage-based allocation formula as part of the monograph budget at the University of Windsor. It outlines the elements of the formula, the rationale for selecting those elements and a review of the allocation formula after the first year of implementation. Unique to our formula are two elements: we selected to use the actual book price paid and to use circulation data from the actual book funds.

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1. Introduction

The University of Windsor is a mid-size comprehensive university in Southwestern Ontario, Canada. Established in 1857 as Assumption College, a religious institution, it became a public institution in 1963 comprising several formerly independent colleges. The Leddy Library serves as the main library for more than 140 undergraduate and graduate programs across nine faculties as well as nine co-operative education programs available to over 16,000 full and part-time students. A second library on campus, the Paul Martin Law Library, serves faculty and students in the Faculty of Law. The budgets for the two libraries are separately administered, and this paper deals only with activities in the Leddy Library.

Until the mid-1980s, the Leddy Library's budget was administered by the faculty members in the various academic departments. When responsibility for the budget was transferred to the Library, the process of allocating budgets along departmental lines was maintained. The budget was broken down into two main budget lines, monographs and serials, which were then each subdivided by academic departments roughly reflecting the academic departments of the University. Monographs are further subdivided into three separate funds for firm orders, standing orders, and approval plans. Not all subject areas have approval plans, and it is at the discretion of the subject specialist how the area's monograph budget is distributed among the three funds. Academic programs and departments have grown and changed as the institution transformed from a small, liberal arts college into a comprehensive university with a focus on three pinnacle areas for research: automotive engineering, environmental science, and social justice. In the mid-1990s, the Library created a third main budget line for electronic resources that was not directly tied to any one subject discipline. At first small, the electronic budget has now grown to make up approximately three-quarters of the Leddy Library's allocations budget.

Over the years, only minor adjustments have been made to the allocations budget in response to these institutional and environmental changes. Motivated in part by a perceived discrepancy between the Library's budget and the current needs of the campus, the Leddy Library's Strategic Plan 2005–2009 mandated a thorough review of the library's collection budget. The primary reason for the review was to ensure that the budget was being spent in the most effective manner possible to meet the teaching and research needs of faculty and students and consequently to help fulfill the mission of the Leddy Library and the University.

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More specifically, there was a recognized need for accountability and transparency for the budget process, there was a need to identify and address historical inequities and allocation problems as there have been major shifts in the University's programs and enrolment, and there was a need to address the overall fund structure. There have also been major shifts in the publishing and distribution of scholarly information. All of these factors necessitated a thorough review of the budget allocations process for the Leddy Library.

2. Budget allocation working group

In February 2005, librarians with collections responsibilities selected members to serve on the Budget Allocation Working Group who would conduct the review and report back to the librarians and administration with recommendations for the budget process. The membership of this group comprised librarians with collections responsibilities in the Arts and Humanities, Economics and Business, the Sciences, and the Social Sciences. The Group commenced its work in March 2005 and worked throughout the summer. A member of the group had been earlier assigned to conduct a review of the relevant literature concerning budget allocations with a particular focus on the use and applicability of allocation formulas. This review was presented to all librarians with collection responsibilities in January 2005, prior to the selection of the Group members. Consequently, the literature review served as a starting point for discussion.

3. Literature review

There is extensive literature on the topic of budget allocations and the applicability of allocation formulas in libraries. Research topics have ranged from the generic question of how many libraries allocate by a kind of formula to comprehensive reviews on the different formulas to research regarding the development and implementation of specific formulas at individual institutions.

3.1. Formula use

In the early 1940s, Muller explored the question of the extent to which academic libraries incorporated allocation formulas into their operations and found 73.3% apportioned the budget among academic departments; in the early 1970s, Greaves' survey of academic libraries in the Southeastern U.S. found that 67.5% of respondents reported allocating funds to departments (quoted in Budd and Adams) [1]. While the second figure is slightly smaller, Budd and Adams note that both surveys "indicate that a majority of academic libraries were, in past years, using allocation formulas of some sort" (p. 382). Budd and Adams surveyed 834 academic libraries (with minimum expenditures of \$100,000 a year) and inquired if many of them used an allocation formula and if they were pleased with it. They had a relatively low response rate (42.8% or 357 responding libraries) and financial constraints precluded more than one mailing of the survey; however, 40.6% of the respondents indicated that they used "some sort of formulation" (p. 384). The question of satisfaction with formulas was answered in the affirmative by 77.5% of respondents while 22.5% indicated dissatisfaction. A notable feature of this study was the range of institutions included in the survey as respondents ranged from very small (enrolment of less than 1000) to large institutions (enrolment exceeding 30,000).

3.2. Formula factors

Budd and Adams' study also traced the history of allocation formulas in academic libraries, starting with Hekhuis's paper of 1936 which proposed a formula based on student hours (both junior and senior) and courses offered by academic departments, weighted in terms of dependence on library resources. Stetson followed Hekhuis and suggested similar factors but altered the weightings (quoted in Budd and Adams, p.382). Indeed much of the discussion and debate in the literature focusses on what formula best achieves objectivity and what are the appropriate variables/factors to include in a formula.

Tuten and Jones [13] aimed to identify common elements in allocation formulas and to provide guidelines for their implementation in small university and college libraries. To this end, they surveyed over 273 college and small university libraries (with a student population range of 1000 FTE–5000 FTE) and received a 70% response rate with 40% of reporting institutions using some kind of allocation formula while others were in the process of developing one. Their survey also measured: the portion of budget/availability of funds allocated by formulas; public/institutional knowledge of formulas; use and elements of formulas (noting the common elements of various formulas); and revision frequency. Additionally, this publication included actual examples of the various formulas in use at the reporting institutions. Several studies also noted the importance of library use by discipline/subject; the use and importance of serials and monographs by academic discipline and the number and levels of degrees awarded by discipline [3,12,9].

In addition to these surveys, numerous articles discuss the development and implementation of formulas in individual institutions, ranging in size from small to large libraries. The article by Donna Packer [7] is an example of such a study and is also useful as she provides a table that succinctly summarizes several case studies and outlines the various variables, the problem model (e.g. linear, multiple correlation), funding units (e.g. departments, disciplines) and materials covered by the formula (e.g. books only, books and serials). Most recently, an article by Kitti Canepi [2] aimed "to determine whether common elements in published fund allocation formulas could be used to articulate 'best practices' available for fund allocations in libraries" (p. 13). Her

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