

Statement on the Global Economic Crisis and its Impact on Health Sciences Library Collections

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The Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries (AAHSL) and the Medical Library Association (MLA) endorse the International Coalition of Library Consortia's (ICOLC) [January 19, 2009 "Statement on the Global Economic Crisis and Its Impact on Consortial Licenses."](#) The associations believe this statement is timely and relevant, and that the principles and issues addressed in the statement provide a framework for continuing dialogue between libraries and scholarly publishers. AAHSL and MLA also support, in principle, the Association of Research Libraries [February 19, 2009 "Statement to Scholarly Publishers on the Global Economic Crisis."](#)

Health sciences libraries and librarians are pivotal to the success of all health care organizations. Health sciences libraries are unique in that their collections include clinical as well as scholarly information. A robust library collection of electronic and print resources, supported by the expertise of a qualified health sciences librarian, ensures that health professionals and patients have reliable and timely access to critical health information that supports safety and high quality patient care, education, and research. In this time of economic constraint, however, health sciences libraries are confronted with daunting challenges to maintain the collections and services that are needed to support their institutions' information needs. Budget pressures in the current economic environment are forcing some community hospitals to close their libraries, severely decreasing or eliminating access to vital information and resources. Libraries in most academic health centers are also facing severe cutbacks resulting from declining state support, declining clinical revenues, decreased gifts and endowments, and increased competition for a smaller number of research grants. A recent AAHSL survey found that many academic libraries had mid-year budget reductions in the current fiscal year, and that nearly 70% are expecting budget cuts for the coming year, some of which could be 10% or higher. In many cases, these are permanent cuts to library budgets, and, with few exceptions, libraries will have to reduce collection budgets as part of their cost-saving strategy.

During previous economic downturns, libraries saved money by eliminating duplicate subscriptions and materials in print format, and by discontinuing lower priority titles. Now there are few if any comparable alternatives to absorb escalating costs for serials and databases. The situation for health sciences libraries is complicated by the fact that the cost of STM (scientific, technical and medical) journals has risen disproportionately higher than other fields, and certainly higher than the vast majority of budget increases in health sciences libraries. Thus, the purchasing power and flexibility to build diverse collections suited to institutional needs have steadily eroded in health sciences libraries, as reflected in EBSCO Information Services 2008 and 2009 serials price projections and the 2009 *Library Journal* periodicals price survey (1,2,3).

Both librarians and publishers/vendors share a common desire to avoid temporary or permanent cancellations of valuable information resources. AAHSL and MLA members seek to partner with publishers and vendors to negotiate licensing terms supporting continued access to as much content as possible in this difficult economic environment. Therefore, AAHSL and MLA support the following principles established by ICOLC:

1. *Flexible pricing that offers customers real options, including the ability to reduce expenditures without disproportionate loss of content, will be the most successful;*
2. *It is in the best interest of both publishers and consortia to seek creative solutions that allow licenses to remain intact as long as possible, without major content or access reductions.*

AAHSL and MLA members believe that applying these principles in license and purchasing negotiations will provide a framework that benefits both the library and publishing communities. It is our hope that this statement will be the springboard for our respective communities to engage in a constructive dialogue about viable approaches.

References

1. EBSCO Information Services. Serials prices 2005-2007 with projections for 2008. [Internet]. [cited 20 Apr 2009]. <<http://www.ebsco.com/home/printsubs/priceproj.asp>>
2. EBSCO Information Services. 2009 serials price projection report. [Internet]. [cited 20 Apr 2009]. <<http://www2.ebsco.com/en-us/InfoProfs/serialspriceproj/Pages/2009SerialsPriceProjectionReport.aspx>>
3. Van Orsdel LC, Born K. Reality bites: periodicals price survey 2009. Libr J. [Internet]. Apr 15, 2009, [cited 20 Apr 2009]. <<http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6651248.html>>

Organizational Biographies

MLA is a nonprofit, educational organization, comprised of health sciences information professionals and institutions with more than 4,000 members worldwide. Through its programs and services, MLA provides lifelong educational opportunities, supports a knowledgebase of health information research, and works with a global network of partners to promote the importance of quality information for improved health to the health care community and the public.

AAHSL is composed of the directors of 116 libraries of accredited U.S. and Canadian medical schools, as well as 28 associate members. AAHSL's goals are to promote excellence in academic health sciences libraries and to ensure that the next generation of health practitioners is trained in information seeking skills that enhance the quality of healthcare delivery.