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UMass Boston Library Cuts Squeeze Resources

by [Jennifer A. Dixon](#)

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Joseph P. Healey Library, University of Massachusetts, Boston

Faculty and students returning to the University of Massachusetts (UMass) Boston campus for the Spring 2017 semester will encounter a library with resources noticeably reduced thanks to dramatic budget cuts. On November 10, 2016, an email notified the UMass Boston community of budget cuts for Fiscal Year 2017, including roughly 20 percent of the Healey Library's general operating fund, amounting to approximately \$700,000. The timing of the announcement—after the majority of the library's electronic resource subscription contracts for 2017 had already been renewed—placed the library in a challenging position, forcing it to cancel those resources with soon-to-expire subscriptions, abandoning many useful and needed resources. A notice on the library website advises the campus community that “these non-renewal decisions were driven entirely by the delivery date of the budget cuts memo and by the renewal queue of the Library's electronic resources.” The majority of these resources are based in the humanities and social sciences. Cancelled databases include American Periodicals Online, RefWorks, ACLS Humanities Ebook Collection, Art Full Text, Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology, and the Elsevier Encyclopedia of Mental Health. The library has also foregone DocuTech, an expensive electronic reserves platform, and encouraged community members to utilize Blackboard instead. According to Daniel Ortiz, dean of university libraries at UMass Boston, the cuts feel particularly harsh because they come on the heels of years of growth—over the past five years, the library has added approximately three million items to its print and electronic holdings, with over 30 million total items in the collection. Since 2002, said Ortiz, “we added over 1,000 titles to our independently licensed or subscribed journals” based on faculty demand. The library now must transition to a model that determines what resources are, as Ortiz described it, “mission critical.” There is no current plan to let go of library staff, although administration has reduced the number of student workers. Ortiz did note, however, that a hiring freeze means the library cannot hire a

collection development librarian, forcing him to juggle the roles of dean, collection development librarian, and several other hats simultaneously.

SEEKING ALTERNATE SOURCES

The library has encouraged faculty and students to seek out alternative methods of accessing cancelled resources, including through the Boston Library Consortium and the Fenway Library Consortium. The situation “is going to require creativity through document delivery vendors and other work-arounds, to meet the demands,” said Ortiz. Danitta Wong, cohead of reference, outreach, and instruction, noted that the library is working with faculty to seek out alternative resources to meet their needs—by finding primary source materials at the Boston Public Library (BPL), for example, as well as through WorldCat and ArchiveGrid. “While only an academic library can provide the specialized offerings to match the totality of faculty interests and student curricula of a given college campus, the Boston Public Library is also a research library, with some very special holdings,” said BPL president David Leonard. “Libraries are an essential online and in-person resource for those pursuing higher education or engaging in research. This is especially true in a city such as Boston, home to so many universities and colleges, and we welcome everyone who works, lives or goes to school in Massachusetts to take advantage of our collections spaces and programs.” Looking ahead, Ortiz is collaborating with the university provost, deans, and faculty to strategically determine library resources for FY18. “We have to look very closely at the costs with faculty,” said Ortiz, to determine if desired resources are “core or something that we could live without, or through document delivery through a vendor that would make it much more cost effective.” According to Wong, this situation highlights the importance of receiving feedback from faculty. “This situation definitely got people’s attention and is opening up communication in a lot of ways,” she said, noting that the library has received numerous inquiries from faculty about which resources were cut and why. “People are willing to work with us to find solutions going forward,” she said, and added, “We can be resilient.”

budget cuts

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