

## Letter

### A discussion on document delivery

To the Editor:

I read with great interest the article "Implications of Commercial Document Delivery; Criteria for Substituting Electronic Journals for Paper Ones" by Bill Coons and Peter McDonald (October 1995). Overall, their succinct review of the issues concerning commercial document delivery (CDD) and the factors that ought to be weighed should prove to be very helpful to those making these often unpleasant decisions.

However, among their secondary factors, i.e., the issue of publisher type, there might be some useful elaboration. While I can understand how their characterization of publisher types tends to fit the sciences nicely and the social sciences probably as well, I would argue that journals in the arts and humanities produced by related societies and organizations more often fall in the least expensive category; this generalization is not supported by any studies on my part, just some anecdotal information (and a fervent personal belief). These journals are often precariously underwritten by a combination of dues collected from readers, grants from nonprofit arts organizations, and various academic and governmental subventions than often may be the case with scientific journals.

Two titles supporting my observation are *Art Documentation* (published by the Art Libraries Society of North America) and *Gesta* (published by the International Center of Medieval Art). These two cost well under \$100 for an annual subscription. Indeed, if we ignore the cost of some indexes supported by the general reference budget here at Fullerton, there are only three or four active art serial titles that exceed \$100 annually in my library. The loss of two or three dozen institutional subscribers for either of the above publications, for whatever reason, might seriously jeopardize their existence. Also, forcing the remaining subscribers to divy up the increased per-item charges might not fly in the humanities arena where budgets have been notoriously lean for years.

I view those in the sciences, both publishers and those who fill the pages of scientific journals, as being complicit in soaking up an inordinate amount of our institutional acquisitions budgets with their price increases. Add to this the unceasing kind of bibliographic par-

tenogenesis that sees three science serial titles spawn themselves into a half dozen or more new manifestations that cost many times more than the original three. For these reasons, I would claim that journals in the humanities, and perhaps in the social sciences, need to be viewed in a less jaundiced, if not different, way.

And if we agree that serials in the arts and humanities command a kind of "fiscally responsible higher ground," I believe they should be less subject to the knife of CDD. In fact, the great representation of science journals among the CDD services now available suggests that the profit-making sector knows well where the bundles of cash are tied up in institutional materials budgets. Therefore, it would be nice for me to think that the authors might be willing to codify an additional secondary criterion that would recommend more fiscal compassion in dealing with serial subscriptions in the arts and humanities.—*Floyd Zula, California State University, Fullerton; fzula@fullerton.edu*

### The Authors Respond:

Mr. Zula is essentially correct in his assessment. Science journals have been increasing in subscription cost at a rate of about 7–15% per year over the last decade, and are generally more expensive to begin with than humanities periodicals. Therefore, CDD in the sciences makes far more sense than in the humanities, especially in these times of increased subscription costs and leaner acquisition budgets.

Furthermore, many humanities journals, notably in the fields of art, art history, architecture, anthropology, and the like, contain extensive visual materials which do not translate well in the monochromatic copies provided by CDD. By comparison, graphical components of science journals suffer far less from photocopy representation.

The authors therefore concur that the use of CDD in the humanities deserves deeper scrutiny and more judicious consideration than in the sciences, where the preponderance of titles are from commercial publishers. Cancelling science journal subscriptions in favor of CDD also serves as a way for academic libraries to send a message to commercial publishers that their exorbitant price increases are not acceptable.—*Bill Coons and Peter McDonald* ■