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UF budget cuts force library to move materials online

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MICHAEL DeVOOGD, Alligator Contributing Writer | Posted: Friday, January 23, 2009 12:00 am | 0 comments

UF students spending hours at Library West may have to start staring at their computers instead of flipping through books.

To cope with Gainesville's budget deficit, UF libraries have reallocated funds from printed materials to online resources.

According to the 2009 budget for library materials, UF libraries have moved money from monographs and print subscriptions to electronic journals, databases and books - a move some students and faculty may prefer.

UF libraries have a flat budget of about \$7.9 million, which is the same as last year, according to the budget. But inflation has caused a \$700,000 increase in library material costs.

Collection managers in UF departments have been tasked with deciding what materials to cut this fiscal year, while still ensuring essential books remain untouched.

"Everything is of value to somebody, or we wouldn't be buying it to begin with," said Judy Russell, dean of university libraries. "But they do try to look at what are the least used databases."

Russell said monographs, books about one specific topic, are most often cut because they can be obtained through inter-library loans, which reached 50,000 last year.

According to Russell, the habits of UF students and faculty have changed, and now, electronic resources make up about 60 percent of the total budget.

"I think a lot of our students and faculty prefer the online resources," Russell said. "They like being able to get at them 24/7. They like the searchability and the cut and paste."

Some UF professors have become alarmed by the unavailability of important monographs in the libraries.

R. Allen Shoaf, a UF English professor, said he sees a steady reduction in the money allotted for books in his department.

Shoaf said he believes the unavailability of certain books can have a big impact on his

students' abilities to learn the material he teaches.

"Critical monographs are expressions of informed, scholarly opinion," Shoaf said.

He added that the monographs train students to critically compare competing opinions.

"It hurts us when we have to cut something," Russell said. "It's a matter of choosing as carefully as we can."

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