

PROBLEMS OF INTERNATIONAL ACQUISITIONS

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ABSTRACT. Both problems and solutions are included in a contribution to a panel discussion on the free (and not so free) flow of astronomy/astrophysics publications across political boundaries.

1. INTRODUCTION

There has always been the need to obtain all kinds of foreign books, periodical publications, bulletins, irregular publications from other astronomical observatories and from commercial publishers, but the difficulty of acquiring foreign materials adds innumerable obstacles to the job of some of the serials librarians. Factors contributing to the problem are:

- (a) Required evidence of advance payment before an import/export license is issued (e.g., the ESO Atlas).
- (b) Postal system problems: delays (sometimes for months) due to strikes; loss of parcels.
- (c) Breakdowns of communications between countries.
- (d) Payment problems: we can only transfer a certain amount of currency abroad. (Unofficial information has reached me just recently that this restriction may be lifted in the near future.)

2. BOOKS

In spite of these difficulties, it is possible to obtain library materials in our field, chiefly through agreements with dealers and publishers. Agreements are sometimes made with the publishers, but they often could be made with a dealer. Purchasing plans are numerous, but of these only a few are relevant to our branch of science.

There are several ways of obtaining astronomy/astrophysics books, such as: the standing order (for I.A.U. Symposia, Colloquia, etc.), selection of titles from catalogs, or selection from "on approval" shipments. The last possibility may be the best choice for those with tight budget restrictions, since one can evaluate the books personally

before committing funds, and return those books for which there is less need.

3. PERIODICALS

Periodical publications are one of the most important tools for specific researchers, who want to see everything published in their fields. Lack of funds and the escalating cost of periodical subscriptions makes it impossible to acquire even those titles which the researchers consider the most necessary. Don't give up the ship! Everyone is having these problems.

Thanks to centralized ordering, we have had fewer problems since 1974, when the University of Cordoba (through its Administration Department) began purchasing periodicals for all its libraries from one single dealer. As a small highly specialized library, with a small budget, we are careful to order only those journals most in demand. A priority number is given to each journal title. If funds are cut, the title list is also cut, from the lowest priority number.

Through central ordering the University of Cordoba renews the subscriptions several months in advance. Some titles run from January to December, and others from July to June. The irregular journals need special handling. The Observatory library is able to choose its dealer, but in fact, no one agency or dealer is able to give completely satisfactory service in all phases of acquisitions.

Some titles can only be obtained through the society which publishes them. As a result of all of these factors, it would be necessary to maintain contacts with three or four sources, and yet be prepared to make individual purchases beyond these sources.

Experience has shown that in any change of subscription status, there always occur gaps and duplications, and sometimes dealers are uninterested in servicing titles which are difficult to locate or hard to keep current. This is especially true of titles which are published in a different place each year or by different sponsoring institutions: irregular publications of conferences, university publications, international conferences, symposia, colloquia, congresses, etc.

4. EXCHANGE

An effective way of obtaining current material is through exchange. Fortunately we exchange publications with most of the world's astronomical observatories, and in this way have sometimes been able to complete our collections of proceedings of conferences, symposia, etc.