

Benefits of a Two-Year Catalog Cycle

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Why Print a Paper Catalog?

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Notice

This paper was written as an Academic Publications Office report for California State University, Chico. As such, the conclusions and recommendations reached are specific to CSU, Chico. This report and its attached appendices is being shared with other CSUs for the sake of sharing information, not to advise or criticize any CSU policies or universities.

Please feel free to use the data collected in this paper for your own reports and analyses. How this data informs your processes will, as with so much in life, vary given your specific situation.

Intent of this Paper

This paper is intended to provide a high-level summary of the benefits of a two-year catalog cycle, as well as the financial *costs* associated with not printing a catalog. This paper will reference specific, staff level concerns that are explained in detail in the attached appendices. Catalog production staff are eager to find ways to streamline the paper shuffle and simplify procedures and deadlines. This paper intends to show that moving to a one-year cycle, or not printing a catalog, won't achieve those goals.

Benefits of a Two Year Catalog Cycle

A two-year catalog cycle provides time and breathing space for everyone involved. Producing an accurate catalog that is useful to its users requires a great deal of coordination. University Affairs, the Academic Senate, departments, colleges, staff, and faculty all have to meet decision deadlines and produce material that will become the catalog of record.

With a two-year cycle, meeting all these deadlines and tying it together is challenging but doable. **There is enough slack in the rope to allow for last minute changes and additions, like the recent Science Education program.**

On a two-year cycle, there is a brief period between cycles when departments and staff can clean up errors introduced in the last cycle, and discuss and implement new ways to increase efficiency or better use new software. This is also the time for colleges and academic programs to review the freshly published catalog and use it as a stimulus for preparing their next round of catalog changes.

A one-year catalog cycle may be suffocating. Coordination will become difficult as deadlines become more crushed. Many of the deadlines can only be tightened so much, because they are dependent on catching up with a number of staff and faculty and receiving their input and blessing before moving to the next stage.

If the coordinators are rushed, the accuracy and usefulness of the catalog may decline. There won't be time to work in last-minute past-deadline additions, such as the Science Education program. A one-year cycle will provide no downtime between catalog years. The cooling-off period will be lost. **In short, flexibility will suffer and stress will increase. The dangers are similar to overheating an engine.**

Cutting the catalog cycle in half will not cut the workload in half -- it will double it. After speaking with staff who work in the affected academic areas, it has become apparent that to provide the same level of service under a one-year cycle more staff would have to be hired. For example, a student would be a sophomore or junior before their degree audits would be ready, because the degree progress report staff use the off-year in a two-year cycle to prepare the next year's reports. Procedures and policies can be revised and streamlined to speed this up, but going to a one-year cycle does not seem to be the way to start that process.

Stanislaus State went to a one-year catalog cycle for their last catalog. **It has caused such widespread problems that they are now struggling to go back to a two-year cycle.** The cost, stress, and general frustration caused by the shift has outweighed the benefits.

Jim Jessee, who has been an analyst, curriculum database administrator, and catalog editor for over thirty years, has written a detailed paper describing not only why this campus uses a two-year cycle, but what specifically it allows us to accomplish that we otherwise could not. He originally wrote the paper in 1995 with Dr. Robert Standing, Director of Advising, and has significantly updated and revised it for today's campus. Jim Jessee's paper goes into great detail on what we use our two-year cycle to accomplish, and his paper is included as an appendix.

My paper is intended to just be a brief summary and overview, but I can provide a quick example of the specific negative effect a one-year cycle would have on our campus staff. Kathryn Barth, our Articulation Officer, whose full statement is attached at the end of this document, notes that on a one-year cycle **"the University would see a marked decline in the number of new articulation agreements produced."** This would be a result of losing the six-month period from mid-February to mid-August when ASSIST change reports are prepared and distributed, the ASSIST database is updated, and new templates are generated and applied to over 133 agreements currently published.

That is only one example of the increased workload burden that would degrade the quality of service this campus can provide. I have attached another appendix which provides input from staff who work on curriculum, evaluations, advising, the degree progress reports, and others. **There are no staff positions that I am aware of involved with the production of the catalog that would benefit from switching to a one-year cycle.**

In fact, of twenty-three California State Universities, only seven are on a one-year cycle. Six of these universities are around half our size or less.

Another cost of the one-year catalog cycle is the financial expense of printing a catalog every year instead of every other year. This drawback can be avoided by simply not printing a catalog at all. However, not printing a catalog will actually end up costing the University far more money than it would save in printing costs due to our unique and profitable agreement with the Associated Students.

Why Print a Paper Catalog

The most compelling reason to continue printing a paper catalog is that there is a demand for it. The Associated Students Book Store sells catalogs to parents and students at a modest profit. Their sales have increased consistently over the past several catalogs. **Not only is there a demand for the print catalog among students, that demand is growing.**

Remember, these are catalogs that are being sold for money. Students are buying them. Almost exactly 6,000 2005-07 catalogs were sold. The Book Store is on track to sell 6,800 2007-09 catalogs.

The campus also gives away thousands of catalogs for free. These go to community colleges, high schools, on-campus advisors and faculty and staff. Here the demand still exists, though it is decreasing. **It is likely the number of catalogs provided to institutional users could be cut radically.**

That isn't to say it could be cut entirely. A recent survey of the CSU system showed overwhelming support for printed catalogs. Sonoma State did not publish a print catalog in 2004-06, instead providing CD and Web copies. **They received so much negative feedback and criticism, mostly from faculty and staff, that they went back to a print version.**

Fresno State has had pressure from the administration to adopt a paperless catalog, but that has been resisted. Their evaluators cite a need to have a print catalog they can look at -- with PeopleSoft, they have too many screens open already, and **it's an overload to have to deal with so much on-screen information.**

San Francisco State has consistently received an "**enormous level of unhappiness**" whenever a paperless catalog is proposed. They have cited a desire to be able to sit anywhere with a student when discussing academic programs. They don't find it acceptable to have to crowd around a computer screen to try to show students which way is up.

This is a just a handful of specific commentary to help paint the picture.

It is important to note that every campus that prints a catalog is reducing the number printed by many thousands. There is widespread agreement that the number of print catalogs needed is decreasing, but almost no one is happy with the idea of getting rid of them altogether.

All twenty-three California State Universities publish a printed catalog.

The Cost of Printing

The University Catalog costs this campus around \$25,000 each year. That buys us about 15,000 catalogs at 664 pages each. That's less than three thousandths of a penny (.003) per page per year. **This is a phenomenal price.** Fresno state spends more than three times that at .01 cents per page per year. **We have one of the cheapest catalogs in the CSU system by a very long shot.**

I have spoken with the catalog editors of other CSU campuses and learned:

- How many catalogs they print
- How many pages long their catalogs are
- How much it costs the campus to print
- Whether they print every one or two years

The results of that survey are attached to this paper. I used the data to find out what the annual cost to each campus is to print one catalog page.

Here's a breakdown of fourteen CSUs and how much their catalogs cost, with the cheapest at the top:

University	Annual Cost¹
1. Los Angeles State University	.002 cents per page
2. Chico State University, Chico	.003 cents per page
3. Cal Poly Pomona .	.003 cents per page
4. East Bay State University	.003 cents per page
5. Sonoma State University	.004 cents per page
6. Sacramento State University	.004 cents per page
7. San Bernardino State University	.005 cents per page
8. Cal Poly San Luis Obispo	.006 cents per page
9. San Diego State University	.007 cents per page
10. Humboldt State University	.007 cents per page
11. San Francisco State University	.007 cents per page
12. Fresno State University	.01 cents per page
13. Maritime Academy	.014 cents per page
14. Channel Islands State University	.018 cents per page

Los Angeles State is a bit cheaper than us, partly because they print 19,000 catalogs at 800 pages each. Paper and ink is cheaper in bulk. They also have some pretty sharp staff to have secured the printing deals they've got. **We get our catalog at less than half the cost of most of the campuses listed above.** Not only is our catalog cheaper, but it has a higher production value

¹ Annual cost per page is found with this formula: **[Total Publication Cost] / ([# of Catalogs] * [# of Pages per Catalog])**, and then divide the whole thing by two if the catalog is printed on a two-year cycle. Cost is shown this way because this is the smallest common element for all university catalogs. Comparing total publication costs doesn't give a good picture, because some Universities may print 3,500 catalogs while others print 19,000, and some print every year while others print every two years. Annual price per page allows the comparison of apples to apples. You may view the attached CSU Publication Stats table for a complete data set.

than most other campuses. This is owed largely to the impressive photography we include in the catalog, promoting and branding CSU, Chico's most appealing qualities.

The way we achieve such a commendable value is through our relationship with the Associated Students. The AS spends a great deal of money subsidizing not only the printing of the University Catalog, but also the superb and widely recognized production value of our catalog. The AS, by the way, makes back what they invest, plus a small profit, by selling 6,000+ catalogs to students.

If we were to stop printing a catalog we would lose our financial relationship with the AS. The only financial reason the AS has to pay for a high quality catalog is the printed copies they get to sell. **If we kill this golden goose, we're going to suffer in more ways than one.**

To maintain the same quality of photography and design for a Web catalog without the AS will cost the campus an additional \$12,500 per year. Losing the support of the AS would also cost the Academic Publications Office an additional \$18,500 per year which is currently used for catalog production and Web design programming and maintenance. **In effect, we would save the campus \$25,000 in printing costs, and incur an additional \$31,000 in production costs.** This net loss for the state would be caused by adopting a one-year catalog cycle, or canceling the print catalog.

I could write another paper on our catalog production and Web publication process, which is completely in-house and largely student written. No one else has what we have, and they want it badly. Other CSU campuses regularly ask me to provide them with as many details as I can regarding our production system. **We will not be able to afford this system without the support of the AS.**

Most University Catalogs are not as vibrant as CSU, Chico's. CSU, Chico is lucky to have a photo director and an art director of Jeffrey Teeter's and Gregg Berryman's caliber. Our catalog is jam-packed with awesome photos. **These photos won't be available in the quantity or quality we enjoy if we sever our relationship with the AS.**

The printed University Catalog is a recruitment tool. It is a branding tool. The Web or CD catalog would not be as effective. **The University Catalog is a striking and arresting first impression for many prospective students.**

The University Catalog has always featured a color photo essay that is used as the basis for other public relations productions outside the catalog. In addition to the essay, the hundreds of catalog photos are used by individual departments, colleges, and academic programs in producing their own promotional materials. The essay, cover, photos, and overall catalog design is managed by a creative art director and photo director. **We are able to afford such high production values solely because of our financial relationship with the AS, and we have that relationship solely because we publish a printed catalog.**

If the printed catalog goes, there will almost certainly be a decline in catalog production quality due to a sudden lack of funds. **Cancelling the print catalog would throw away one of our most efficient uses of tax payer money.**

Other Benefits

Aside from the simple fact that there is a powerful demand for the catalog, both institutional and commercial, there are other benefits to having a printed copy. Our University Library, as well as my office, have copies of printed catalogs and class schedules stretching back over thirty years. It does not happen often, but once or twice a year someone will come to us asking about courses or degrees from when they graduated way back when. **They need this information for legal, credentialing, or employment purposes.**

Having the archived, hard copies of the catalog allows us to accurately and confidently answer any of these questions. It's a nice service to be able to provide to our citizens.

Additionally, paper copies last. **The simple fact of the matter is there is no better archival option than dead tree books.** CDs and DVDs degrade in about ten years' time. Archived Web pages are not only vulnerable to failed hard drives, but we cannot be confident about their immutability. A misclick or a simple accident, to say nothing of intentional maliciousness, could alter the archived catalogs of record and there would be no easy way to tell they had changed.

Legally, our University Catalog is not a contract with our students². **But this University has a proud history of rising above the mere minimums spelled out by the law³.** We are here to serve our students, our staff, our faculty, and our state in the greatest, not the least, way possible. We have had a policy of treating the University Catalog as a binding contract between the University and the student. This is important for the reputation of the campus.

Having no printed catalog makes it much easier to neglect this outstanding service and violate Title 5 CCR § 40401.

Running a one-year catalog cycle makes it more difficult -- perhaps too difficult -- to provide accurate and exceptional catalog copy to the students. As we lose the breathing space to accommodate last minute changes, departments will be tempted to issue their own 'official' publications for their academic programs. **This could lead to violations Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations, section 40401.** It will become effectively impossible to pin down what was "official" at the time the student enrolled. Our campus has been there before. It is confusing, demoralizing, and frustrating for everyone, but especially the students.

After consulting with many of the individuals, both staff and faculty, who produce our campus catalog, it is my opinion as the catalog editor and coordinator of academic publications that moving to a one-year cycle or cancelling the print catalog will degrade the quality of service we can provide and result in a net increase in expenses by thousands of dollars for the University.

² Mandatory catalog copy from the Chancellor's office.

³ <http://ccr.oal.ca.gov/> Title 5 CCR § 40401

CSU Catalog Publication Statistics

University Name	Print?	Production Cycle	Total Cost	Quantity	Size of Catalog	Annual Cost
Los Angeles State	Does	Two-year	\$65,000	19,000	800 pages	.002 cents per page
Chico State	Does	Two-year	\$50,000	15,000	664 pages	.003 cents per page
Cal Poly Pomona	Does	Two-year	\$60,000	18,000	600 pages	.003 cents per page
East Bay State	Does	Two-year	\$41,000	10,000	672 pages	.006 cents per page
Sonoma State	Does	Two-year	\$40,000	15,000	350 pages	.004 cents per page
Sacramento State	Does	Two-year	\$100,000	20,000	716 pages	.004 cents per page
San Bernardino State	Does	One-year	\$10,000	4,000	547 pages	.005 cents per page
Cal Poly San Luis Obispo	Does	Two-year	\$80,000	14,000	510 pages	.006 cents per page
San Diego State	Does	One-year	\$53,000	18,000	450 pages	.007 cents per page
Humboldt State	Does	One-year	\$11,000	6,400	294 pages	.007 cents per page
San Francisco State	Does	One-year	\$53,000	10,000	768 pages	.007 cents per page
Fresno State	Does	One-year	\$50,000	9,000	560 pages	.01 cents per page
Maritime Academy	Does	Two-year	\$17,000	6,500	187 pages	.014 cents per page
Channel Islands State	Does	One-year	\$22,000	3,500	336 pages	.018 cents per page
Bakersfield State	Does	Two-year	\$?	?	?	?
Dominguez Hills State	Does	Two-year	\$?	?	?	?
Fullerton State	Does	Two-year	\$?	?	690	?
Long Beach State	Does	One-year	N/A	?	820	Bookstore pays for all
Monterey Bay State	Does	Two-year	\$?	?	?	?
Northridge State	Does	Two-year	\$?	\$?	\$?	\$?
San Jose State	Does	Two-year	\$?	?	528	?
San Marcos State	Does	Two-year	\$?	?	?	?
Stanislaus State	Does	One-year, is changing back	\$?	?	640	?