



11-2001

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Recommended Citation

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the dean's corner

DACUS LIBRARY / WINTHROP UNIVERSITY / NOVEMBER 2001 / NUMBER 18

P.A.S.C.A.L.—The Cooperative Spirit

Imagine a highly productive knowledge environment where members of our academic and research community have equitable, immediate access to library information and services regardless of their location and at the time they are most needed.

PASCAL. It has nothing to do with the famous French philosopher. It has nothing to do with a computer language.

Rather, it's both.

Well, okay, not entirely. **Partnership Among South Carolina Academic Libraries** is the brainchild of South Carolina academic librarians. If the infant survives, it will become the braintrust of South Carolina's public and private academic libraries resource sharing collaborative. PASCAL has to do with technology on the one hand (computers) and a philosophy of broad-based library service on the other.

Sharing is, of course, not new to South Carolina academic librarians. We've been sharing for decades now. We have to. It's the nature of library services to do that sort of thing. We borrow from each other because budgets are too tight and needs are so great. Decades ago South Carolina academic librarians began sharing resources. And expertise. And just about anything else you can think of. The two groups, the Library Directors' Forum (consisting largely of academic librarians at publicly supported

institutions) and the Library Directors Council (consisting of members of the South Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities), worked with an understanding between the groups but also tended to work asymptotically; always approaching but never quite reaching a full-service joint venture.

The sharing proved uneven, too informal. With the explosion of both information and technology, the need to share became greater, and the need to organize our sharing with each other, whether public or private institution, paramount. Eighteen months ago, academic directors and deans from both the public and private aisles of academe put all their heads together and, like Athena from the head of Zeus, PASCAL was born from the heads of librarians. PASCAL is a veritable empyrean of services, as you will see.

The vision and mission statement of PASCAL says it best: "*We, the library directors at South Carolina's public and private higher education institutions, imagine a highly productive knowledge environment where members of our academic and research*

community have equitable, immediate access to library information and services regardless of their location and at the time they are most needed." The document goes on to report that PASCAL's goals: "*To assist South Carolinians in reaching their potential in academic achievement, economic development and personal growth, we recognize that we must cooperate to enhance library resources and services for students and faculty. Working in a cost effective and collaborative way, we, the participating public and private academic libraries of South Carolina, commit ourselves to improve our own resources and services constantly, and to provide timely access to the totality of the state's information resources from each academic library in the state.*"

That may seem like a mouthful, and it is. In shirt sleeve English, this is what PASCAL hopes to accomplish:

- To provide universal access to core materials and information services for every student and faculty member of institutions of higher learning in South Carolina.

- To enhance research collections that support scholarly achievement and further economic development in South Carolina.

- To encourage direct resource sharing among academic libraries in South Carolina.

- To preserve the materials that contribute to the memory of South Carolina history and culture for future generations.

- To provide opportunities for collaborative training and professional development for library users and staff from South Carolina's academic libraries.

- To develop and nurture relationships with key partners including but not limited to the Commission on Higher Education, the South Carolina State Library, and the Office of Information Resources, in order to maintain a South Carolina virtual library comprised of accurate, up-to-date, comprehensive electronic information.

- To strengthen the role of the academic library in helping higher education meet its mission across

the South Carolina community.

All of this translates into very concrete objectives: the establishment of a virtual union catalog; virtual reference (or reference-when-you-need-it); cooperative professional development; collaborative collection development; consortial purchasing; universal borrowing (already underway); remote storage (already in process); preservation; and the South Carolina digital collections project (already with limited participation).

Key to PASCAL, and therefore to *all* library users, is its consortial purchasing ability. Similar ventures in surrounding states (VIVA in Virginia; NCLive in North Carolina; Galileo in Georgia; and TENN-Share in Tennessee) are able to buy databases and other *academic* resources at substantial discounts. This savings is passed on to participating libraries and, in turn, to their parent colleges or universities. PASCAL makes so much good sense for it is a commonplace axiom that when you help out a library you do not help one student or one program, but every student pursuing whatever his or her chosen career.

Funding for PASCAL will be critical. Already South Carolina libraries are stepping up to the plate pledging, in these troubled economic times, portions of their materials budget to get

PASCAL off the ground. That's how important it seems to us. But more will be needed. Similar ventures in surrounding states are supported by numerous means, most often lottery money. Legislatures there were quick to realize the potential merit of such cooperatives and eagerly funded them. They have not been disappointed!

There's more to learn about PASCAL and we invite you to visit the website at <http://web.presby.edu/pascal/>. Academic librarians in South Carolina understand that this is a great undertaking, obviously, but we believe South Carolina is a great state. Great states are known for their support of education. We are sympathetic to those who complain about the cost of learning. We agree that education is a costly venture, and, furthermore, it never seems to end.

On the other hand, we contend that while education is a costly endeavor, its opposite, ignorance, is more costly still. Ignorance impoverishes while making blind. Perhaps this helps to explain why states that eschew educational funding become more and more impoverished with each passing year. Sadly, those states are never really able to see, or even to understand why.

Mark Y. Herring
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the dean's corner

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