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Mark Y. Herring

Winthrop University, herringm@winthrop.edu

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Little Red Herrings — “Well, There It Is”

by **Mark Y. Herring** (Dean of Library Services, Dacus Library, Winthrop University) <herringm@winthrop.edu>

If you missed the movie **Amadeus**, you missed one of those great lines in movie history. **Mozart** has just composed one of his brilliant pieces and plays it before **Emperor Joseph II**. His fictive nemesis in the movie, **Salieri**, made it so the **Emperor** will act unfavorably upon it. At the end of the piece, the **Emperor** looks at **Mozart** and says, “Well, there it is.”

Sometimes over the course of following politics in any state, not just South Carolina, one is forced, like the **Emperor**, to look at what has come to pass and declare, “Well, there it is!” When I heard that **PASCAL** funding was in trouble, it was all I could think to say. I hope by the time you read this, my article will be useless because the problem will have been resolved to the state’s satisfaction and well-being.

Like you, words could not begin to convey my undying, heartfelt thanks to our South Carolina legislators for their courageous support of **PASCAL** last year. The \$2 million support from lottery funds enabled, as you know, 56 public and private academic libraries in the state to aid the education of 150,000 students enrolled in our institutions of higher learning. What could be better than this from any point of view, not just a librarian’s? State-wide support, for all, equally.

You’ll recall that academic librarians were so eager to bring **PASCAL** to fruition we “taxed” ourselves first by creating a membership fee schedule. All academic libraries pay these membership fees because we wanted to underscore just how important **PASCAL** is to us, and to the state. Everyone rejoiced and the money has been put to excellent use, already allowing the state to see more than \$2 million in cost avoidance.

The reason **PASCAL** can make this astounding claim, as you know, is because the 56 academic libraries in the state buy a number of the very same electronic databases. By using this consortium, instead of buying these databases 56 times (and trying to get 56 individual good deals—an impossibility) **PASCAL** buys them on behalf of the state’s academic libraries and at bulk prices, avoiding costs while serving the state’s 150,000 students enrolled at its institutions of higher learning no matter where they are.

Governor Sanford has rightly cautioned the state’s agencies about the judicious use of the state funds. **PASCAL** does this like no other agency can, not only pooling resources, but also sharing them statewide! The potential cost avoidances are enormous. **VIVA**, Virginia’s version of **PASCAL**, won its governor’s award

for frugality by allowing that state to avoid costs to the tune of \$100 million over 10 years! Can anything you think of equal this in either cost avoidances or resource sharing?

That is why it is so heartbreaking to learn—“Well, there it is”—that neither the Governor’s budget, nor the House Ways and Means bill shows any continuation funding for **PASCAL**. Allow me a bit of space to explain how this funding benefited the library where I work. Before the **PASCAL** initiative, our library had fewer than 7,000 full-text, electronic journals. When **PASCAL** implemented its initiative in February 2005 for the first time, our ownership soared to more than 21,000 full-text journals! Moreover, because **PASCAL** knows that some institutions will want different kinds of journals, its buyers’ program allows institutions to choose certain programs to buy into or not. We did and we now have an additional access to over 2,000 journals in science that we never could have subscribed to before, owing to cost. By being a part of **PASCAL**, we can now share with students and faculty access to materials that was heretofore impossible. In our first full month of the **PASCAL** database offerings, our students made more than 17,000 searches!

Now here’s the thing. I know there are 55 other such stories. Some will be even better than ours, some not quite as good. But the point is, every library in the state, and every student attending any South Carolina college or university, public or private, has reaped the information dividends. So how could it not be in the budget for next year? “Well, there it is.”

South Carolina was the last state in the region to get a state-supported academic consortium. North Carolina, Virginia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, to name but a few, all have them and provide even more

than what **PASCAL** is able to provide to its academic libraries. With **PASCAL** in place, however, there is now clearly no reason why any student would want to look elsewhere for his or her college education. If its funding is discontinued, prospective students may well see better support at institutions in other states. **PASCAL** estopped brain-drain, if

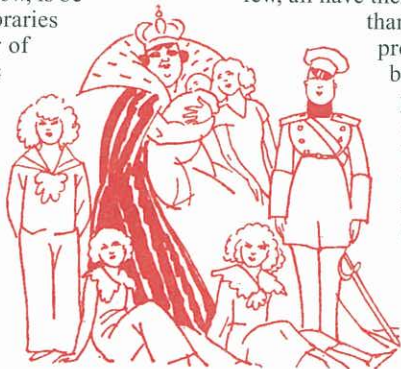
you will. If funding is not continued, we might well say the dike has once again been unplugged.

I need not focus on students in our colleges and universities, either. We see more than 1,000 community patrons in our library each week. I’m sure the other 55 libraries see many community patrons as well. Finally, they all have access to every kind of infor-

mation, from sophisticated health care materials to information about tsunami relief just by walking into any South Carolina academic library building.

I view **PASCAL** as the second **Gutenberg Revolution** in our electronic age. Its survival really must be guaranteed. Without state help, **PASCAL** simply will not continue. To those brave men and women in the South Carolina’s legislature who funded **PASCAL** last year, please, the state is counting on you to reinstate **PASCAL** funding!

If you haven’t written your representatives thanking them and asking them about next year, consider this your tongue-lashing and write that letter—now. 🍷



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And, last but definitely not least, just heard from the wonderful **Jim Mouw** <mouw@uchicago.edu>. He says that he just learned that his daughter “matched” with **MUSC** for the coming year. She’ll be doing a **pharmacy fellowship**. So, hopefully, **Jim** and his wife will be in Charleston a lot! Hooray!

That’s all for now, folks. See you in June! 🍷