

# the dean's corner

DACUS LIBRARY / WINTHROP UNIVERSITY / SEPTEMBER 2004 / NUMBER 26

## Annus Mirabilis

***“Nothing is certain, especially in uncertain budgetary times. Yet not only did the budget process see us capture the increases requisite for continuing our first-rate access, but we also saw another major addition from an unexpected source.”***

With a headline like that you'd expect the opening line to begin, "Between the end of the 'Chatterley' ban/And the Beatles first LP," now wouldn't you? But Larkin is hardly to my liking. Too staid and buttoned-down my children tell me, I'm much more likely to fall upon a millennium more married to my muse such as,

To solemnize this day  
the glorious sun

Stays in his course and  
plays the alchemist,

Turning with splendor of  
his precious eye

The meager cloddy  
earth to glittering gold:

The yearly course that  
brings this day about

Shall never see it but a  
holiday.

Of course my children are right. *King John* seems perfect to usher in this particular glorious, new academic year.

So why is this year so mirabilis, as Dryden might say? In the first case, the library has once again been shined upon by the glorious light of gold. I do not grasp such words lightly, either. When you've been at this work of libraries where increases denominate in the tens of thousands, "gold" is not an inappropriate image to cast. Nothing is certain, especially in uncertain budgetary times. Yet not only did the budget process see us capture the increases requisite for continuing our first-rate access, but we also saw another major addition from an unexpected source. More on that later.

We begin with *JSTOR*, about which we've written before. It's an electronic database of about 200 journals that begin with volume 1, number 1, and continue to the present. Most of the journals are in the humanities and the social sciences, but other disciplines are also represented. *JSTOR* is no small beer, either. "Admission" is quite expen-

sive and annual fees are in the mid-five figures range (hiccup!). We now not only have access to full, very long runs of journals that we may have begun only ten or fifteen years ago, but we also have access to titles we've always wanted but could never afford. It's a win-win arrangement. All of these journals are now online and available everyday, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. In many ways, the library is never closed.

*JSTOR* began with the humanities collection, which we now own. It also offers other collections in science and art that we'll look at in years to come. We cleared the first biggest hurdle, the price of admission. Now that we've paid this, the other collections may be possible by reallocating and/or rearranging our current purchasing profiles. Certainly a combination of slight increases with other reallocations may make such things possible. What makes *JSTOR* so important is the right to source

codes should the company ever go under. In layman's terms this simply means we will never lose access to what we now have.

This part of the glorious year has been made possible by the responsiveness of the good people in Tillman. Throughout the budget process everyone understood the necessity of the library's resources and the need to maintain them. Our increases owing to inflation are rarely less than 10 percent. Given that our materials budget now exceeds \$800,000, this is nothing to sneeze at. Bear in mind that this increase buys nothing new; it simply maintains our current place. Academic libraries all over the country suffer not only cutbacks but severe decreases. The responsiveness of this administration in safeguarding our current holdings while substantially increasing them with *JSTOR* is nothing short of a year in the "glorious sun."

But there's more. Late in the state's budget process, the South Carolina Legislature approved PASCAL funding. Now politicians get a bad rap. Next to lawyer jokes, politicians rank a close second in categories of professions we love to ridicule. We needn't. Serving as a politician is a thankless, difficult task. Besides, if men and women were angels, we wouldn't need government. But we aren't, and so we do.

Late in the state's budget process, the South Carolina Legislature approved and the governor signed PASCAL funding. PASCAL, as you'll recall, is Partnerships in South Carolina Academic Libraries. Of all the states in the southeast, only South Carolina did not have a state-supported consortium exclusively for academic institutions. PASCAL sought to remedy that, being the *omnium gatherium* for the state's 54 public and private academic institutions.

For 11 years, PASCAL labored to bring together all its institutions and its legislators to a single-minded vision. The result was (via membership fees) a built-in funding mechanism to hire an executive director (Rick Moul) and begin the process of bringing PASCAL access to all South Carolina citizens. To date, PASCAL, on its own, initiated the following for its members:

- EBSCO buyer's club deal for 4 databases and 28 participants. Cost-avoidance: \$100,000;
- ScienceDirect with 8 participants and about \$1.1 million spent;
- Institute of Physics Archives with full, consortium-wide participation;
- Joint, statewide borrowing; and,
- Digital statewide virtual library of images.

Once PASCAL formed and acted, the next step involved securing state funding for statewide databases. The idea is a sound one and only makes sense. Rather than have each institution buy the same 8-10 databases 54 times, the state buys them and distributes them statewide.

The cost-avoidance of such initiatives is remarkable. During the last decade, Virginia's VIVA has posted more than \$100 million in cost-avoidances for its member libraries! There aren't many ways to make libraries inexpensive; but if any one idea can help make them better, it is a consortium like PASCAL. It's the only way to remove the sting of the haves from the have-nots while guaranteeing all participants information access wherever they live. *Gloria in excelsis!*

*Annus mirabilis*, indeed!

#### **MY Herring Dean of Library Services**

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## **the dean's corner**

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