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Back Talk-Pros and Cons of Alumni Remote Access to Online Resources

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We believe that this restructuring of the current committee and task force structure will immediately save the library substantial time, money, and resources (structurally).

Considering the results of this study, it would be unreasonable to expect the Vice-Director to implement the Task Force recommendations (above). Therefore we suggest that the results be shelved until such time as the lowest geological strata (some respondents used the name “Hades”) accumulates are remarkable abundance of ice crystals.

Webworthy
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A web page allows you to get a glimpse of astronomers’ visions; the Astronomy Departments list offers an instant to astronomers a great snapshot of college choices; and Astronomy Pictures will dazzle viewers with some of the best photos of our universe. csweb.n-strasbg.fr/astroweb.html

Biowarfare

Would you hire a former bioweapons lab scientist? Just how much Pasteurella tularensis does it take to cause rabbit fever? Check out these two sites to explore the fascinating topic of Bioweapons.

— Offering an in-depth look at the Chemical and Biological Weapons Nonproliferation Project at the Stimson Center in Washington, D.C. www.stimson.org/cbw.

— All the Virology on the WWW provides a list of disarmament projects and Department of Defense sites, and the full text of the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention. www.virology.net/garry/vawebbw.html

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Web. This way the alumni receive value from their schools but not at the cost of supporting today’s students.

Contributors to the Liblicense list on this topic which I read included the following: Ann Okerson, Dana Bostrom, Elhanan Adler, Joanne Deeken, John Abbott, John Cox, Katherine Klempner, Katherine Porter, Martin Borchert, Michael Spinella, Michele Newberry, Peter Boyce, Richard d’Avignon, Rick Anderson, Scott Wicks, and Thomas Sanders.

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University of Southern California, Texas A&M University, Virginia Tech University, University of Western Ontario, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Yale University. The universities are providing both the financial resources for the project as well as staff time for data collection and testing of methodologies. An article about the project appears in the June issue of ARL: A Biweekly Report on Research Library Issues and Actions from ARL, CNI, and SPARC in 2001, and throughout the project’s three phases, information about the study and its activities will be available through the ARL New Measures Initiative Website at <http://www.arl.org/stats/newmeas/newmeas.html>, which also hosts resources relating to the other ARL new measures projects. For further information, contact Rush Miller, University of Pittsburgh <rmiller@pitt.edu>; Sherrie Schmidt, Arizona State University <sherrie.schmidt@asu.edu>; or Martha Kyrrilidou, ARL Senior Program Office for Statistics and Measurement <martha@arl.org>.

Well, y’all, I have a huge Rumors file still not tapped and I’ve run out of room! I told you the summer was unbelievably busy! Stay tuned for November!

Against the Grain / September 2000
Arguments against remote alumni access to Library supported commercial sources of information:

1. Identifying and authenticating an ever-expanding group of former students is difficult and expensive.
2. Many publishers are already fiscally on the brink; any revenues lost threaten their existence.
3. Money spent meeting the needs of yesterday's students is money not spent meeting the needs of today's students.
4. Alumni are not only former students but they are also employees of companies. These companies should pay for the professional information needs of their employees.
5. License negotiation is already protracted and costly. Adding the need to negotiate alumni access only adds to the difficulties and the costs of this process.
6. If alumni associations want to add information support benefits, they, not libraries, should negotiate and pay for them.
7. Open the gates to all sorts of abuse, e.g., the spouses of alumni providing their employers with free access to information, the friends of alumni are given the passwords needed to gain access, etc.
8. Government and private support for higher education is already inadequate and tenuous. Redirecting funds to the needs of yesterday's students will both water down the value of what we can give today's students and cause our supporters to question the value of the purposes for which their support is used.
9. There is really little alumni demand for this sort of informational support. This is just a librarian thing.
10. Colleges and universities enjoy educational discounts for many databases, e.g., chemistry, pharmaceutical medicine, etc. Why endanger these discounts?
11. When the alumni were students, the fees they paid were according to the programs of which they were a part. If they want access to commercial sources of information, why should things be different now?
12. The alumni pay for other benefits like football tickets, why not commercial sources of information?
13. Doubtful if most alumni would favor someone taking a part of their contributions to pay for the information needs of other alumni who are not willing to pay their fair share.
14. When a course ends, the student loses the right to the professor's time and energy.

My own observations.

Arguments in favor of extending free access to commercial sources of digital information assume that since information is good, it is good to share it freely. The arguments against this sharing assume that to do so will incur extra costs for everyone involved: publishers, libraries, and higher education funding groups and that those who benefit should pay. I find side by side with those in opposition to extending free access an institution's alumni. Nothing is free; the questions are: who will pay and when will they pay?

At times, as information professionals, we are frustrated that our patrons fail to understand that: many of the e-journals and other resources they are looking at are there only because we are paying the bills. We want, therefore, to have our logo or brand on these pages so that our patrons won't forget just how important our library budgets are to their success. On the other hand, when an issue like providing free access to former students comes up, many of us are only too willing to pretend that this information is free, or at least that any extra costs should be absorbed by publishers who are already making too much money. If we want to provide "free" access, someone will have to pay for it: today's students who will get less, publishers who will raise their prices, or the private or public groups that make our work possible.

I am in favor of supporting distance education and lifelong learners. I just returned from a month of interviewing television university librarians, students and teachers in China about their informational needs. These needs are very real. I felt many times how nice it would be to allow the students and faculty at some of these schools to access Columbia's resources. Yet, I have to recognize that decisions to share information require money to make them a reality. As information professionals, we shouldn't redistribute resources from today's student needs to yesterday's students in silence. We have to fight for additional resources and/or recognize that we just can't share what we don't have. Here at home, I don't think it has to be all or nothing. I think we can help alumni groups develop (not do it for them) information resource hompages that take full advantage of the many truly free resources that are otherwise lost in the chaotic richness of the