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Op-Ed-Opinions and Editorials-Once More With Albert

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Once More with Albert

by **Tony Ferguson** (Associate University Librarian, Columbia University) <ferguson@columbia.edu>

Albert [Henderson] (see *ATG*, v.11#6, pp. 32) poses a question and makes a number of points. Let me restate what I believe to be his question and main points and respond.

Albert: How does one justify the deliberate transition from fast dissemination to slow (except as from expensive ownership to cheap access)?

Tony: My son posed this same sort of question to me when I came home with an \$8,000 Kia instead of an \$80,000 BMW. My answers are the same: Both get you from point A to point B, but one does it more cost effectively and I didn't have enough money to do otherwise.

Albert: There is a plot afoot to raise professorial research productivity through the use of information technology.

Tony: This is news? This is a plot? The history of American higher education has this as a central theme and a not totally fulfilled wish.

Albert: "Stunted library spending," responsible for fewer career opportunities for librarians, justified the closing of at least one famous library school, and forced publishers to raise their prices and to narrow their editorial.

Tony: **Buzzy Basch** has made a career of training librarians to cut serials so it helped at least one librarian. Library schools have so many problems, how can we put them all on reduced library spending? As for libraries forcing publishers to raise prices: Albert, I know you get paid to write stuff like this, but have you no shame?

Albert: Libraries began to cut their spending because of the proliferation of the **Xerox** model 914 copier and legisla-

tive support for library photocopying as fair use. The savings went to [university] profits.

Tony: When did we cut spending? As prices grew so did our budgets. Prices (reflecting greed, a failing dollar and more information) have just grown faster than our budgets. As for photocopiers and **Congress** being the culprits, I think it has more to do with the rising price of **Ben and Jerry's** ice cream.

Albert: Government statistics reveal that academic revenues minus expenditures leave a surplus.

Tony: This is perhaps one of life's great mysteries. Maybe it has to do with putting the surplus (gifts) into the bank to build up endowment income—they are saving for a rainy day. At my institution, we take in a lot of money, we spend even more money, and we borrow money annually. If there are great centers of profit out there, please advise.

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November 2-4, 2000

21st Annual Charleston Conference
November 7-10, 2001

22nd Annual Charleston Conference
November 6-9, 2002