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Little Red Herrings -- "Well, There It Is"

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If you missed the movie *Amadeus*, you missed one of those great lines in movie history. Mozart 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 avoidance 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 avoidance 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, electronic journals! Moreover, because PASCAL knows that some institutions want different kinds of journals, its buyers' program allows institutions to choose different 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 stopped 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 information, 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.