

24 August 2011

To: SIUC Graduate Council  
From: Ryan Netzley

Re: Proposed Withdrawal of Print Journals

I recommend that the SIUC Graduate Council consider condemning any attempt or plan by the Dean of the Library or his agents to withdraw print copies of journals covered by the JSTOR full-text service, or any other electronic database. The proposed action is itself misguided and unnecessary. And the rationale that Dean Carlson has provided, both in print and in presentations, is unsound and poorly researched:

1) **The proposed withdrawal is short-sighted:** Withdrawing print copies of journals covered by JSTOR or other databases is financially imprudent, given recent increases in subscription fees for electronic journals. In summer 2010, Dean Carlson wrote a memo lamenting the increase in subscription fees for *Nature* and its consortium journals. More recently, Jonathan Nabe was heralded in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* for breaking up large journal bundling deals, which all journal publishers to increase licensing fees substantially.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of the broader national climate then, we have local evidence of Morris Library fighting against database price increases. However, this proposed withdrawal of print journals would make SIUC more beholden to JSTOR than it currently is, by requiring the library to lease the very back-issue journals that it currently owns in print.

Despite Dean Carlson's assurances in a memo that attempts to distinguish JSTOR from for-profit publishers, we have no reason to believe that JSTOR would not pursue precisely the same pricing strategies. Conspicuously, Dean Carlson's memo, "JSTOR Perspectives," ignores the fact that one of the very individuals, Ross Housewright, that he brought to campus to promote this policy seeks to bring academic libraries more in line with corporate ones and that the analogy that Mr. Housewright offers between corporate and academic libraries authorizes an analogy between for-profit and not-for-profit journal services.<sup>2</sup> In short, even with Dean Carlson's assurances, there is no scenario in which this would be fiscally prudent policy.

2) **The policy's chief external proponent is guilty of willful misrepresentations of history and his own research:** JSTOR and its research arm Ithaka have lobbied for a withdrawal of print journals, at least since the spring of 2009, and obviously JSTOR would stand to benefit from an increasingly monopolistic relationship with SIUC's library. Dean Carlson brought representatives from JSTOR and Ithaka to campus on 27 October 2010, as part of an initial push on this policy. Mr. Housewright, one of the chief architects of this proposed deaccession, works mainly on the similarities between corporate and academic libraries. During his presentation, he falsely claimed that university libraries originated with no preservation function, despite the fact

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Howard, "Libraries Abandon Expensive 'Big Deal' Subscription Packages to Multiple Journals," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 17 July 2011. <http://chronicle.com/article/Libraries-Abandon-Expensive/128220/>

<sup>2</sup> David Carlson, "JSTOR Perspectives," OpenSIUC: [http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/morris\\_articles/39/](http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/morris_articles/39/)

that his own work acknowledges precisely this preservation function and laments that fact that it has been “reified”:

This dedication to mission is commendable, and many library roles such as preservation do address societal priorities. Many libraries have, however, reified these values into specific roles and activities that no longer match the needs of the library’s local users and whose expense is hard to justify.<sup>3</sup>

This may seem like a petty rejoinder, but Mr. Housewright’s portrait of university libraries as primarily driven by usage and not preservation goals is a key rationale for Dean Carlson’s proposed withdrawal of journals. The fact that one of its chief proponents misrepresents both the history of university libraries—by conflating their founding principles with those of corporate libraries—and his own work in propagandizing for it suggests that we should be decidedly wary of accepting such arguments.

3) **There is no exigency:** Dean Carlson’s presentation to the Graduate Council on 7 April 2011 cited Paul N. Courant and Matthew “Buzzy” Nielsen’s study of the cost of keeping a book in physical storage. Courant and Nielsen’s study describes libraries as “prime real estate” and suggest that fewer physical books could lead to “enhanced library services.”<sup>4</sup> This study, however, was written primarily from the perspective of librarians at the University of Michigan, where space is at a premium. Dean Carlson’s only examples of enhanced services, increased collaborative learning space for students, consultation space for faculty and library staff, event space, and special collections space, were already achieved by the recent library renovation.<sup>5</sup> Neither has he offered evidence that space is a particular problem at Morris Library, particularly give a currently empty basement and incomplete sixth and seventh floors. In short, there is no premium on space that is currently limiting the library: there is a premium on cash.

4) **Dean Carlson’s stated rationales for this proposal are unsound and ignore pivotal research on reading and learning.** In addition to the specific arguments lodged by Dean Carlson and JSTOR for deaccession of print journals, Dean Carlson’s presentation to the Graduate Council on 7 April 2011 pointed in general to the increasing prevalence of electronic or digital reading, using Amazon’s Kindle as a primary example. At no point in this presentation did Dean Carlson explain why a university library should follow the model of commercial booksellers. This is not just to contend that universities aren’t bookstores, but rather that even commercial booksellers are under increased financial strain, so it makes little financial sense to adopt their business model.

More importantly, none of the arguments for the proposed withdrawal exhibits even a passing awareness of the multitude of studies on the difference between print and digital reading

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<sup>3</sup> Ross Housewright, “Themes of Change in Corporate Libraries,” *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 9 (April 2009): 265.

<sup>4</sup> Paul N. Courant and Matthew “Buzzy” Nielsen, “On the Cost of Keeping a Book,” in *The Idea of Order: Transforming Research Collections for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholarship* (Washington, DC: Council on Library Information Resources, 2010), 102. Other articles in this volume cite Housewright’s work approvingly and explicitly present the transformation to digital libraries as a foregone conclusion in need of the correct propaganda strategy. See Lisa Spiro and Geneva Henry, “Can a New Research Library Be All-Digital?,” 20.

<sup>5</sup> David Carlson, “Shifts,” *Cornerstone* 6.2 (winter 2011): 2.

strategies. Dean Carlson's presentation also reveals that he has given no consideration to the burgeoning field of reading studies, either within neuroscience or humanities fields. Thus, he cites approvingly an article by Jeffrey R. Di Leo in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that imagines books as texts:

The real difference—the real reason that academe has been slow to embrace digitization—is cultural, not material: an attitude rooted in the belief that the printed book is intrinsic to scholarship. Ink is permanent; pixels are impermanent, or so the argument goes. This perspective is not an ontological or metaphysical one: People who believe that books are permanent do not believe that books can't be destroyed. Rather, they believe that the comfortable manner in which readers approach a paper-and-ink object is fundamentally different from the attitude they bring to a digital copy. These attitudes are the products of cultural conditioning and habit.<sup>6</sup>

This is hopelessly shoddy argumentation: no one claims that readers approach paper in “a comfortable manner,” or that libraries should keep print copies because that's what readers are used to. Rather, the argument is that—and the discussion, scholarship, and research on this subject has been extensive and ongoing over the past fifteen years, not only within the humanities, but also within neuroscience, and the social sciences—reading a book is a fundamentally different type of reading than reading a screen and that we have no evidence that they are not so radically different as to impact learning. In short, there's an extensive field of study arguing that books aren't texts and Dean Carlson's approving citation, even in jest, of Di Leo demonstrates that he's either utterly unaware of or utterly uninterested in it.

Regardless of the shoddiness of Di Leo's argument here, what's most disturbing is the lack of serious research and argument in Dean Carlson's own proposal. Unfortunately, he has done little more than paint his opponents as hopelessly benighted reactionaries who just aren't hip to the future and, simultaneously, as paranoid apocalypse-mongers. Opponents of Dean Carlson's proposal to remove print journals are not luddites: rather, they worry that he is naïvely celebrating novelty for its own sake, without considering or imagining what the effects of that future might be or doing the basic work of surveying the research on these fundamental issues. The fact that one does not want to lease journals back from JSTOR—journals that we already own—does not make one paranoid or reactionary: it makes one a sentient human being in the 21<sup>st</sup> century aware of the budgeting and fiscal exigencies of university libraries and their vendors.

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<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey R. Di Leo, “The Cult of the Book—and Why It Must End,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 26 September 2010. <http://chronicle.com/article/From-Book-to-Byte/124566/>