To be received and placed on file:

The Committee met on October 6, 2003; November 3, 2003, and January 21, 2004. We are conducting more and more of our business by email; lack of meetings does not indicate a lack of activity.

The chief ongoing concern remains the budget. The library is no longer singled out for extreme cuts, as it was until 2003, but the situation for the entire higher education system in California is nothing short of catastrophic. We are thus unable to make up for the cuts suffered in past years, and must endure still more cuts. Meanwhile, book and especially journal prices are increasing at a rate considerably above the general inflation rate.

The Internet and other electronic accessing mechanisms do not make up for shortcomings in a research library. Quite the contrary. Librarians nationwide must now work harder on issues of information literacy. This has been a major concern for the systemwide University of California Library Committee, and no resolution is at hand. Students have to be taught not only how to use all these electronic forms, but also how to evaluate the completely unweeded and unpruned material available on Internet. Moreover, electronic journals are often exceedingly expensive, and the problems of archiving them are not solved yet. A huge problem is the fact that when one cancels a paper journal, one has all the back files duly on shelf, but when one cancels an electronic journal, one normally loses all access to all back files (unless they have been printed out and bound and stored, or otherwise archived at enormous, and now usually unthinkable, expense).

Last August, the Chronicle of Higher Education, in its annual survey of the 114 research libraries in North America, ranked UCR 96th, with 2,141,065 volumes and a staff of 136. This represents slender growth in all categories from the previous year, but the rise in relative standing (from 99th to 96th) is more a measure of the terrible cuts suffered everywhere else than of our healthy growth. The Chronicle has regularly reported on the desperate situation facing academic libraries everywhere. The “information explosion” and the “age of information” do no one any good unless the information is available.

In this connection, the most important business facing the UC library system this year was trying to deal with rising journal prices. A small group of private publishers has achieved more and more dominance in academic journal publishing, particularly in the very profitable biomedical field. Elsevier is by far the largest and by far the most notorious for its extremely high prices and profit margins (see the Chronicle, Jan. 23, p. A34). The University was able to strike a deal with Elsevier, thanks largely to the diligent efforts of Daniel Greenstein. With support from academic senates at several campuses, he was able to mount a credible threat that UC would not only pull out of long-term deals but would urge faculty members not to serve on Elsevier editorial boards (some 37 UC faculty members serve on these boards). Dan Greenstein was a guest of our committee on Nov. 3. Pursuant to this, we drew up a resolution for the UCR Academic
Senate, but the deal with Elsevier was finalized soon enough to make the resolution unnecessary. Elsevier’s Science Direct package supplies about 1100 journals; UC was able to get the package at a reasonably “low” and set price for five years, and to ensure access to back files of electronic journals.

Most of the activity at the University Committee on Library meeting (Feb. 11) involved discussion of this situation. The future is cloudy. There is nothing to stop the publishing companies from continuing to raise prices of essential journals, forcing us to drop more and more other journals to keep up. Meanwhile, copyright and access laws and practices are getting more and more strict. Possibilities for remediying the whole process include starting more open-access non-profit journals, especially online.

On a more mundane level, the Committee has to deal every year with proposals for new programs. These have to contain a library component. The tendency of departments and schools is to “blow this off.” Typically, a brief, noncommittal paragraph is submitted, with no attempt made to see what the library’s actual holdings in the area are, and no indication of whether these are adequate for the program. We routinely send these back for serious attention. We respectfully urge the Academic Senate to convey a message to all departments that these library issues are really serious, and need really serious attention. A program cannot be run on interlibrary loan and Internet services.

A worthy exception to this attitude was found in the proposal for a graduate program in Religious Studies, which had a good section on library resources. We recommended approval, but only if proposed funding was available.

The School of Education proposed a joint program with various state universities, for a Doctor of Education. The initial paragraph on library resources was totally inadequate, but fuller information was eventually supplied at our request. The program seems on hold for the indefinite future, however, for various reasons (including budgetary ones).

From last year, we note a lack of action at any level in regard to our resolution that new faculty hires (especially in humanities and social sciences) be given start-up packages that take account of their library needs, comparable to the start-up packages for laboratory facilities that are given to new science hires. At present, the system is inequable, to the great detriment of the university and its new faculty. Chairs and Deans will have to take the initiative if this is to be ameliorated.

Respectfully submitted:

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