To Share, or Not to Share
By Lance Query

Michigan is behind the times and the needs of its citizens. One close-to-home example is sharing of library resources. In the fast-evolving age of information, Michigan's information superhighway is as inadequate—and as full of potholes—as its expressways and state highway system. The promise and possibilities of information access are unparalleled; the reality is that many of our citizens are information poor.

My first concern is for the academic environment of the state since that is my domain. While it is true that the state has developed a strong set of regional networks, consortia, and cooperative ventures, the infrastructure that would promote easier and better access to electronic information resources found in the State's colleges and universities is simply not there. There is a theoretical commitment to "share," but an accepted and workable plan, to which all academic institutions would be committed, does not exist. In particular, programs that would allow institutions to maximize their acquisitions dollars do not exist.

In a number of other states, the academic library community has led the way to multi-type library cooperation and advocated involvement of public, school, and other libraries in the structure. One such state is Ohio where OhioLINK (http://www.ohiolink.edu) has provided a single automation system that connects all campuses, patron-initiated borrowing, regional off-site storage facilities, and reference databases. That success has come about because of generous funding by the legislature and the establishment of an "office" within the Ohio Board of Regents. A full-time staff of 10-plus individuals is an indication of the basic requirements that a state-wide system demands—as well as solid support provided at the state level.

Lest one suppose that only the "richer" states are leaders in this effort, one can turn to Georgia where the appropriately named GALILEO system (http://galileo.galib.uga.edu) is the force that has brought about across-the-board access and sharing. In this example, a different model has achieved that common goal. In contrast to Ohio, the Georgia system has used the respective local systems and made them accessible to all via a Web-based Z39.50 client. One of GALILEO's strengths is its easy access to many online and Internet databases. The common goal that both Ohio and Georgia attain is no-cost resource sharing among participating libraries. And, GALILEO functions with only four staff members at the coordinating center.

Another "working model" is found in Virginia where academic libraries have recently formed VIVA (http://www.viva.lib.va.us/), the "virtual library of Virginia." VIVA is a consortium of the libraries of the 39 state-assisted colleges and universities. One of its components is regional electronic resource centers that cooperatively purchase, develop, and store a wide variety of databases, and provide training and access. The state legislature has funded VIVA with nearly $5 million for the 1996-98 biennium. Besides these three state models, Pennsylvania has PALCI (http://www.lehigh.edu/~arh5/palci.htm); SLED is connecting Alaska from shore line to mountain top (http://sled.alaska.edu); and Indiana has an initial $1 million authorized for the purchase of online and Internet accessible databases.

Why is Michigan not listed in this cutting edge group committed to sharing resources? The answer is complex and lies in a variety of variables. One major obstacle is the fact that academic libraries in Michigan are autonomous, unlike those in Ohio where a strong state board controls the educational postsecondary enterprise. Without a central authoritative structure, the "intentions" often expressed by Michigan institutions have not been catalyzed. The directors of public academic libraries (COLD: Coalition of Library Directors) and the directors of private academic libraries (AICUM: Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Michigan) meet regularly and have supported shared access to electronic resources and other cooperative efforts. The first real step toward a state-wide plan is a pilot project between 60 academic libraries and OCLC's FirstSearch databases and online journals. This project, facilitated via the Michigan Library Consortium, is seen as an incentive for other forms of cooperation. But, the lack of a central authority makes any agreement to act far more difficult. Moreover, the two organizations, COLD and AICUM, lack continuity in membership. The largest institutions, Wayne State, Michigan State, and Michigan, have all changed their library leadership in a three-year period.

Still another Michigan factor rests in the realm of institutional image and association. Although COLD is composed of all the directors of the publicly funded institutions, Michigan's two largest academic libraries are primarily interested in working with the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC), which is comprised of the Big Ten schools and the University of Chicago. That world class set of schools has developed its own network, CICNet. In effect, Michigan and Michigan State University have chosen to work primarily with their peers in other states in sharing resources. This has had obvious implications for the other twelve public academic libraries located in Michigan.

Do these factors dictate a no response to the "share or not to share" question? Of course not. For the first time in several years, two strong leaders have emerged at the state level: George Needham at the State Library of Michigan and Randy Dykhuis at the Michigan Library Consortium, which is composed of nearly 600 libraries of all kinds and sizes. Both have initiated discussions with the directors of Continued on page 6
To Share...  
Continued from page 5

academic libraries, who, in turn, are essential for state-wide cooperation.

The changed library leadership at the three largest academic institutions has brought people to this state from states that have already developed cooperative sharing. And I, of course, am equally committed to the concept and its implementation.

One special initiative has already begun. Seven academic libraries, public (including WMU) and private, plus the Detroit Public Library, the Library of Michigan and the Michigan Library Consortium have joined to explore avenues of cooperation. In January of this year, the ACCESSMichigan Project came into being. That project has a multi-step, multi-year structure that will create a digital library system. All citizens of Michigan will have access to the information they need, when they need it, and where they need it. The first phase will provide access to electronic indexes; ASCII full-text, article images; library online catalogs; and electronic journals. The second aspect will include flat-rate access to OCLC's interlibrary lending for all participating Michigan libraries. Part of the implementation includes assisting the libraries to digitize the materials in their collections so that the information can be electronically transferred. Phase three will provide flat-rate access to OCLC cataloging for all participating libraries. Implicit in these goals is the intention to involve all libraries, public and school, as soon as possible. While the beginning rests with the academic libraries as the major players, the end must be state wide, library wide, resource wide, citizen wide.

To share—or not to share? There is no question. ACCESSMichigan can and will lead the way, and I am proud of the role WMU has played in this important effort. Western Michigan University is fully committed to providing our share of leadership and resources to ensure that the project shall succeed.

"The light that radiates from the great novels time can never dim, for human existence is perpetually being forgotten by man and thus the novelists’ discoveries, however old they may be, will never cease to astonish."

—Milan Kundera

Friends of the University Libraries
Western Michigan University
Annual Membership Application

I/we wish to become members of the Friends.
Name __________________________
Address ________________________
City ____________________________
State & Zip ______________________
Telephone ______________________
Please make your checks payable to:
WMU—Friends of the University Libraries.
Return to:
Waldo Library
Attn: Bettina Meyer
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5080

PERSONAL

__ Student $ 5.00
__ Associate 10.00
__ Contributing 25.00—99.00
__ Donor 100.00—499.00
__ Patron 500.00—999.00
__ Benefactor 1,000.00 or more

CORPORATE MEMBERSHIPS

__ Donor $ 100.00—499.00
__ Patron 500.00—999.00
__ Benefactor 1,000.00 or more

Contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Dwight B. Waldo Library
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49008-5080

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Kalamazoo, Michigan
Permit No. 478