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II.8.11. Div.XII/Comm.5/WG *Libraries* - Manifesto

Correspondence to the Editors of “The Observatory”

Declaration Concerning the Evolving Role of Libraries in Research Centres

The following declaration reflects the concerns of its drafters at the increasing invisibility of research libraries *vis-à-vis* recent accelerated changes in publishing and reader-access technology. It was drafted subsequent to the colloquium *Future Professional Communication in Astronomy*, held at the *Palais des Academies* in Brussels on 2007 June 10-13, although it does not derive directly from that meeting.

The declaration, after a period of consultation and discussion with astronomers and research centre librarians worldwide, will be presented to the International Astronomical Union through its Commission 5 (Documentation and Astronomical Data), part of Division XII (Union-Wide Activities), with the request that it be considered for adoption as official IAU policy. We hope this important issue will generate discussion among the readership of *The Observatory* and would welcome any support for the declaration or comments on its contents.

Yours faithfully,

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Declaration Concerning the Evolving Role of Libraries in Research Centres

We call on the astronomical community worldwide to address the importance of libraries and their evolving role within research centres on the grounds that the technology for generating and sharing information is useless if there is no way to locate, filter, organize and access it.

Astronomy has a history dating back to Antiquity and libraries have served as repositories of research and cultural heritage for many centuries; however, the current pace of technological change and development has led to libraries' effectively becoming invisible in the day-to-day running of research centres. The advent of electronic publishing has led to a drastic reassessment of the best ways to promote the communication and storage of research results. The librarian's role in these circumstances combines new with traditional tasks of information management. These tasks include:

- The acquisition of new publications to ensure the fullest possible coverage of subject areas.
- Making information available to patrons wherever and whenever required.
- Archiving sufficient printed and online material to ensure the continuity of the astronomical record from Antiquity to the present day. Electronic publications are of too recent an origin to compete, in terms of completeness, with the traditional library. In spite of the great efforts to digitize old publications, not everything is on the web, nor is it likely to be in the future.
- Providing scholarly access to information resources in all media and in all formats, both physically available and accessed remotely on the Internet.
- Identifying, retrieving, organizing, evaluating, repackaging, filtering and providing electronic access to digital information sources.
- Facilitating easy access through the purchase of licences and other software.
- Applying expert knowledge and familiarity with information resources alongside a specialized subject knowledge, thereby allowing information to be delivered to patrons in a timely and preferred manner.
- Using administrative expertise to create and manage convenient, accessible and cost-effective information services (aligned with strategic directions of organization); i.e. enhancing access through the ability to identify and link patrons to their required information needs.

The ease with which today's research workers access online databases and bibliographical resources can easily hide from view the efforts of librarians in providing these facilities. We therefore call on librarians to adopt a more proactive stance in making their contribution known to the research communities they serve (e.g. through library tours, seminars, courses, etc.). Libraries tend not to be overmanned or to occupy excessive space within research centres, so it is essential that librarians resist misguided attempts at cutting staffing levels and allocating valuable library space to other purposes. Librarians are being asked to perform ever more tasks as part of their duties: they cannot therefore be expected to do more work in less space or with fewer staff.

The main astronomical research journals have tripled in volume and price over the past decade, but this increase in published output and costs has not been addressed by the allocation of library budgets, which have remained static over this period. We call on funding agencies to take the increased volume and cost of astronomical journals into account. We also urge research centres to take into account the rise in both published output and subscription prices when distributing their research budgets. The question is

one not solely of funding at source but also of the relative importance given by research centres to the essential role of libraries.

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