

A JULAC 40th Anniversary Event

by

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On behalf of the Directors of the Joint University Librarians Advisory Committee (JULAC), it is my pleasure to welcome you to this conference on “Emerging Paradigms for Academic Library E-Book Acquisition and Use: Trends, Challenges and Opportunities”

JULAC has just passed the 40th anniversary of its founding, and it is fitting to commemorate this event and the Committee’s achievements with a conference which reflects the strong spirit of co-operation which exists between the UGC funded institution libraries of Hong Kong.

When it was established, JULAC was conceived of as “a forum to discuss, co-ordinate and collaborate on library information resources and services among the libraries of the eight tertiary education institutions of the University Grants Committee of Hong Kong.” In the ensuing forty years, JULAC has fulfilled its brief admirably. Major collaborative programmes now exist between the JULAC libraries to improve access to resources for all staff and students of our universities, optimize the spending power of each library’s information resources budgets, and allow these libraries to create new and innovative services collectively, in circumstances where this could not have been done individually. The recent achievements of JULAC include: the establishment of HKALL, a service which allows users at one library to request and have sent to them books from all the other libraries; membership of the “RAPID” consortium, which has streamlined access to journal articles from around the world; and the negotiation of numerous JULAC consortial purchases of print monographs and electronic databases at significantly reduced prices.

Today’s conference marks the formal conclusion of one such activity. The “ERALL” project (standing for “Electronic Resources Academic Library Link”) both exemplifies the spirit of co-operative endeavour amongst JULAC libraries, and demonstrates what can be achieved through a consortial approach to the acquisition of information resources. Initiated by the Librarian of City University, Professor Steve Ching, and led by City University, ERALL is in essence a consortium for the co-operative purchase of electronic books. In this project, however, the funding has come not from the recurrent budgets of the individual university libraries, but through a matching grant of the UGC for deep collaboration amongst the eight institutions via the Heads of University Committee (HUCOM). By demonstrating the value of a co-operative approach to e-book acquisition, JULAC was able to obtain sufficient funding for this project to enable all eight UGC libraries to participate on an equal basis, something that would not have been possible within the limited budgets of most of these libraries individually. The result is in-perpetuity access to tens of thousands of e-books via each library, adding a valuable electronic resource to the already substantial print collections held in Hong Kong’s academic libraries.

In addition to creating a new resource for our staff and student communities, the ERALL project also typifies how the success of JULAC has come about through a strong sense of shared vision and purpose amongst the Directors and staff of each of the member libraries. All purchases funded by the ERALL project were managed by the JULAC ERALL

Implementation Committee, co-chaired by Dr Colin Storey, the Librarian of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Professor Ching. This Committee included representatives from all JULAC libraries, and their task was to reach a consensus on the titles to be purchased and the proportion of available funding to be committed to each purchase. They performed their task admirably, and ensured that there is now a genuine variety of e-book subject matter to interest the users of all our library services. The membership of this Committee is listed elsewhere in the Proceedings, and they are all to be commended for their efforts.

As JULAC looks ahead to its next milestone, and as we hear a number of papers today discussing many aspects of the emerging e-book scenario, it is worth bearing in mind the collaborative spirit which has brought this about, the benefits which collaboration has created for our respective institutions, and the potential it offers us to do much more in the service of our library users in the future.