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My name is John Laudun and I am a professor of English at the University of Louisiana. (Complete contact information is below.)

More to the point, I am a folklorist, which means I am someone trained in the study of cultures that are either in fact ephemeral or that are perceived as ephemeral. Knowing how hard it is to capture such ephemeral matters as cultural expressions, and also having directed an Archives of Folk Culture whose mission it was to expand the historical record, my only comment to the committee is really the form of a plea: please err on the side of libraries being able to capture as much on-line materials as possible.

I ask this also as an academic who has seen large databases become the de facto standard for periodical subscriptions. The only problem with such databases is that when the subscription runs out, libraries hold nothing. Once upon a time, when things were on paper, at least you would have older issues of a journal to consult. Now there is nothing. Once upon a time you could piece together a nice collection of periodicals for your discipline or for your scholarly interests, keeping within a respectable budget. Now, if the periodicals you need aren't part of an omnibus database, you're out of luck.

This means that anyone pursuing any form of inquiry, researchers and the curious all, is increasingly finding our libraries emptied out. What an irony of the "information age." Surely this is not the legacy we wish to bequeath to future generations?

If it means that copies are only available to those physically located at the library, so be it. I don't advocate turning libraries into additional distribution nodes on the net, but their role as repositories of human knowledge and expression should be as unfettered as possible.

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