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JSTOR Perspectives Essay

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This is the published version of the file which includes JSTOR's permalink. My original version was about twice the length but the newsletter required a shortened, highly edited piece which editing was done by the JSTOR editor. I have included the original, longer version as a supplemental file.

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There was a time when JSTOR's benefits were, if not unique to JSTOR, uncommon. But, times have changed. There has been a very large increase in the number of vendors who offer many terabytes of scanned journal content from high quality journals of academic scope and interest. Yet, in my experience, librarians and scholars continue to hold JSTOR in a unique place of value and regard that goes beyond these now common benefits. If the JSTOR corpus is no longer so unique, what is it about JSTOR that inspires such high regard?

Alignment of Mission. There is an alignment of mission and purpose among JSTOR, libraries, and the academy. On its "About Us" page, JSTOR defines itself as a "not-for-profit service that enables discovery, access, and preservation of scholarly content." These are words and goals that resonate with librarians, scholars, and publishers; they reflect shared values. Indeed, the words "discovery, access, and preservation" could be found in the mission statements of many academic/research libraries.

Respect for Quality. It is well-known that the focus of journal selection in JSTOR is and always has been on high quality, leading scholarly journals; this focus is a compelling reason for scholars' high regard of JSTOR. Importantly, however, JSTOR's commitment to the content is reflected in other ways, especially in its commitment to the faithful reproduction of the printed page in digital form.

Depth. JSTOR has always been committed to scanning every issue of a selected journal from volume 1, issue 1 for its archive collections. This faithfulness to the complete record of a journal and the rejection of any quick scan of content to satisfy the majority aligns with the fundamental values of libraries and academe. The contributions of today's scholars build on the contributions of the past, and "past" means something more than the last four to five years of research.

Breadth. JSTOR has always been broadly and rigorously interdisciplinary. JSTOR has included and scanned journals in the humanities and social sciences with as much dedication and resolve as resources in the STEM disciplines. In the early days of JSTOR, it was one of the only sources of full-text journal literature for disciplines such as history, English, and art history. Even today, JSTOR remains among the most important resources for these disciplines. This interdisciplinary breadth is not just a matter of "fairness" to these often-neglected disciplines; rather, it gives a depth of interdisciplinary richness to the JSTOR corpus that is compelling and uniquely valuable.

Long-term Commitment to Preservation. JSTOR has always been committed to ensuring that the corpus endures. This commitment assures scholars that their investment and reliance on the JSTOR corpus will endure even if the organization itself should fail. These days, when even General Motors can go bankrupt, this assurance and this unqualified commitment to the corpus resonates with us.

Thus, as JSTOR evolves, as it explores new technologies and new opportunities, I offer this advice: the special value and high regard in which JSTOR is held by libraries and the academy is a priceless asset; it must be protected at all costs.

permalink: <http://news.jstor.org/jstornews/2010/11/perspectives.html>

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