

UCSD launches new Pac Rim digital library alliance

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UCSD LAUNCHES NEW PAC RIM DIGITAL LIBRARY ALLIANCE

Through the leadership of the University of California, San Diego, a new consortium of twelve prestigious academic libraries in the Pacific Rim has been formed to facilitate access to scholarly research materials through various digital networks.

"By entering into cooperative agreements and improving scholarly access to the vast collections held by its members," said Gerald R. Lowell, UCSD's associate vice chancellor for academic information technology, "the Alliance will profoundly affect intellectual exchange and mutual understanding between East and West."

According to Lowell, who played a central role in forming the Alliance, the body of knowledge produced in the Pacific Rim during the last few decades has been increasing at an exponential rate, to the extent that no one library can keep up with the information explosion about and from the region. An alliance of major libraries across the political, linguistic, and technical boundaries of the Pacific Rim is the most cost-effective and efficient method to consolidate the collections for the interchange of scholarly information, he said.

Charter members of the Pacific Rim Digital Alliance include: Academia Sinica, Taipei; Australian National University Library, Canberra; El Colegio de Mexico Library, Mexico City; Keio University Library, Tokyo; National University of Singapore Library; Peking University Library, Beijing; University of California, Berkeley Libraries; UCSD Libraries; University of Hong Kong Libraries; University of Washington Libraries, Seattle; and Zhongshan University Library, Guangzhou.

The Alliance will support as many types of new and traditional library functions as feasible through the sharing of electronic and hardcopy data, cooperative collection development, personnel exchange, and other activities. Specific functions will include the development of multilingual online library catalog access, document delivery of journal articles via the Internet, and remote access to local online databases.

The first major Alliance project, according to Lowell, will be a digitization project for access to and preservation of important materials related to the exploration of the Pacific. Each Alliance member will digitize a set of primary source materials, including maps, drawings, explorer diaries, and manuscripts, from its collections. These digital works will then be merged into a unified database with worldwide access provided via the Web. The Council on Library and Information Resources in Washington, D.C. and the UCSD-based San Diego Supercomputer Center will collaborate with the Alliance in this digitization effort.

The concept of the Pacific Rim Digital Library Alliance grew out of a UCSD Libraries project led by Karl Lo, director of the Graduate School of International Relations & Pacific Studies Library, to develop a multilingual server to provide access to online information in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean scripts.

As part of the project, which was funded by a grant from the National Security Education Program, UCSD held a seminar attended by technical library specialists to receive input on the development of the server. UCSD

launched several bilateral agreements for the exchange of scholarly information with some of the key libraries represented at the seminar, including Academia Sinica in Taipei, Taiwan. In June 1997, UCSD invited library leaders from around the Pacific Rim to participate in a conference where the proposal for the Pacific Rim Alliance was developed.

"The success of and the value placed on these initial bilateral exchanges inspired the concept of creating a multilateral partnership to include libraries representing major academic institutions throughout the Pacific Rim region," said Lo. " Our goal now is to get all the building blocks in place for a Pacific Rim virtual library."

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