TO: IUC Provosts  
FROM: IUC Library Directors  
DATE: January 4, 2010  
SUBJECT: OhioLINK and IUC Institutions

OhioLINK has been developed over twenty-one years as a closely coordinated collaboration of the academic leaders of Ohio’s institutions of higher education, their library directors and staff, and the staff of the central OhioLINK organization. For most of this time OhioLINK was governed by a Board made up primarily of representative Provosts from member institutions. This Board ensured that OhioLINK was responsive to its members’ academic programs, that communications between OhioLINK staff and members were effective, that member institution investments in OhioLINK were returned with valued services, and that OhioLINK members retained a strong sense of ownership in OhioLINK programs.

Over the course of the past two years, the oversight of OhioLINK was, by mandate, shifted from the OhioLINK-specific Board of Directors to a structure that views OhioLINK as an operational unit reporting directly to the Chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents (through a representative, David Barber). Rather than retaining a true Governing Board, there is now a generic advisory board that is intended to serve several OBoR technology-related programs. This advisory board has not met in person and has not discussed any of the important issues now facing OhioLINK. As a result of these developments the close working connection between the academic leadership of OhioLINK member institutions and the programs, services and staff of OhioLINK is broken and the academic library community’s confidence in OhioLINK is shaken.

Recently, the Ohio Board of Regents, in response to a very real need to strengthen the technical infrastructure of OhioLINK, unilaterally moved the technical infrastructure of OhioLINK to OARnet. In doing so OBoR staff, not the Executive Director of OhioLINK, dismissed several OhioLINK staff. After this transfer of responsibility for the technical infrastructure, access to the system was dramatically restricted by and to OARnet technical staff, thereby putting an immediate halt to some essential OhioLINK services. These restrictions were put into place mere weeks before final exams, the busiest time in our academic calendar. Services did not begin to be restored for more than a week and full restoration continues. Neither OARnet nor OBoR staff consulted with OhioLINK staff, with Provosts, with OhioLINK member library deans and directors, nor with OBoR’s newly formed Advisory Committee on the timing and implications of their actions. OhioLINK staff were unable to respond to members questions about system access or service restorations.
Given the unilateral moves made by OBoR staff, the roles and responsibilities of the OhioLINK staff are now unclear, especially those of the Executive Director. Since no advice and consultation was sought from members’ academic leaders, their role in directing the future of OhioLINK programs is also unclear. It must be pointed out that OhioLINK members have chosen to fund, from local institutional budgets, over $26M annually of OhioLINK content. In addition many OhioLINK member institutional libraries are making irrevocable strategic decisions based on their expectations of collaborative decision-making regarding the continuity and careful evolution of OhioLINK services. We have made those investments and strategic decisions largely because of the high degree of ownership members have previously experienced through their participation in OhioLINK programs, services, and planning.

To a very large extent, we built OhioLINK and we are OhioLINK. We have envisioned even closer collaborations and synergies between OhioLINK and our individual library programs in the future, but, if we are to move forward successfully we must regain essential elements of the management of OhioLINK. To achieve this, the academic leaders of our member institutions must again have a formal governance role in OhioLINK. The responsibilities of the OhioLINK Executive Director must be clarified and communicated to members. We do not want to see the world’s premier library consortium deteriorate due to unilateral decision making that reflects a total reversal of the foresight and collegial vision that established OhioLINK more than two decades ago.

In summary, we are concerned about the loss of cohesiveness and integrity of the unit called OhioLINK. We are concerned that communications from and about OhioLINK are no longer sufficient for the maintenance of the quality of service our faculty and students depend on. We are concerned that our academic leaders are no longer intimately involved in the management decisions in OhioLINK. Finally, we are most concerned that the ownership that OhioLINK institutions have felt since its inception, the sense of ownership that permits us to make bold strategic decisions about our libraries at the institutional level, is being eroded. We urge the Provosts to insert themselves back into the programmatic oversight of OhioLINK and to help us retain our essential ownership of the world’s premier library consortium.