

COMMITTEE ON THE LIBRARY
Resolution on Ties with Elsevier Journals

To the Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division:

Facing a challenge to scholarly communication

The University of California system faces a challenge in relation to the costs of online journal subscriptions. This challenge has two elements. First, in the immediate future, there is a real possibility that negotiations with one of the largest journal publishers, Elsevier (pronounced: El-Suh-Veer), will not be successful and the University may lose access to many of the 1,100 journal titles represented in Elsevier's Science Direct Online (SDOL) database. Second, these difficult negotiations are symptomatic of an underlying issue in scholarly communications: many faculty publish their papers in journals whose publishers are selling access to these papers at prices that are increasing much faster than inflation.

The immediate crisis: Elsevier

Elsevier's Science Direct Online is one of the largest online journal packages, and the University of California is one of Elsevier's largest customers. For several years, the UC system has negotiated collectively to gain access to Science Direct Online. There have been large savings from the use of the system's collective buying power. UC Santa Cruz has been a particular beneficiary from this arrangement, gaining access to a broader range of journals than it would otherwise have been able to afford.

Online journal charges have, however, been rising much faster than comparable prices, and Elsevier prices have been in the lead. Library acquisition budgets are increasingly being driven by unsustainable increases in journal prices. Elsevier's revenues and profits have been rising fast in recent years. Their profits were up 26% in the last year. Elsevier's prices are not proportional to the use of these journals made by UC faculty. Access to Elsevier journals costs the UC system 50% of its online budget, and use of these journals is only 25% of total online journal use.

UC Faculty members are important players in Elsevier's journals. 10-15% of the content is written by UC faculty, 1000 faculty are on the boards of Elsevier journals, and about 150 faculty are senior editors for those journals.

The University of California started negotiation with Elsevier seven months ago, seeking to establish a sustainable relationship with Elsevier. Those negotiations have not yet concluded but there is a chance they will break down if Elsevier is unwilling to price its product in an affordable way that avoids punishing annual price increases that are 2 or 3 times the Consumer Price Index rate of inflation.

Loss of access to Elsevier journals will have differential disciplinary impact. Some disciplines, such as biology and health sciences, make greater use of their journals.

Tackling the longer term issue

Alternative forms of scholarly communication need to be considered. The California Digital Library (CDL) has been pioneering new forms of publication including the eScholarship Repository. Through the CDL, the University of California also provides tangible support for new scholarly publishing initiatives that promise high-quality peer-reviewed content at affordable prices, including the Public Library of Science and BioMED Central.

Faculty action to retain intellectual property rights would also contribute to meeting the challenge. Authors can negotiate to retain certain rights, including the right to post their work in an institutional repository or distribute copies to their classes.

Resolution

Online access to scholarly papers is increasingly important to scholarly research. Such access would be jeopardized by a breakdown in negotiations between the University of California and Elsevier (Science Direct Online). Successful resolution of the negotiations is threatened by Elsevier's insistence on increasing its charges at a rate far exceeding inflation and to a level not justified by its relative utility compared with other online journal services,

Therefore, the UCSC Academic Senate resolves to call upon its tenured members to give serious and careful consideration to cutting their ties with Elsevier: no longer submitting papers to Elsevier journals, refusing to referee the submissions of others, and relinquishing editorial posts.

The Senate also calls upon its Committee on Academic Personnel to recognize that some faculty may choose not to submit papers to Elsevier journals even when those journals are highly ranked. Faculty choosing to follow the advice of this resolution should not be penalized.

Respectfully submitted,
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