

Albany Faculty Action Needed to Secure Access to Journals at an Affordable Price for SUNY Faculty and Students

March 22, 2004

The Problem:

For many years, increases in the prices of library materials have been larger than increases in the library acquisitions budgets at Albany and in many other research universities. One reason for these price increases is the growing commercialization of scholarly publishing. A second reason is the trend toward large publishing conglomerates, particularly in the sci-tech fields. These conglomerates wield a great deal of power in setting prices and eliminating competition.

Commercial publishers charge more for their materials than do scholarly societies or university presses. The Dutch company, Elsevier, which publishes mainly science journals, is the best example of a commercial publisher charging far more than can be justified by standard economic measures. Over the past decade, Elsevier price increases have often been over 10% annually and, depending on the discipline and the year, over 20%.

In 2003, representatives from SUNY system administration and SUNY research libraries tried to negotiate a new and more favorable contract with Elsevier for continuing access to its collection of 1,100 electronic journals, (these were accessed by SUNY faculty and students approximated 775,000 times last year through the ScienceDirect web platform.) Negotiations stalled over Elsevier's insistence that SUNY campuses would have to commit to the same level of funding they were currently paying and absorb inflationary price increases for each of the years of the contract. Elsevier insisted on a policy of no cancellations over the life of the license. In short, Elsevier's terms would have resulted in an inflexible collection policy at an unaffordable cost. Given the past several years of budget reductions at Albany and throughout the SUNY system, we simply could not agree to Elsevier's restrictive pricing and cancellation policies.

Elsevier was not responsive to our concerns or our counter offer and did not take timely action to negotiate with us. In late December 2003, SUNY reluctantly agreed to a one-year extension of our current license in order to retain access to ScienceDirect journals at the same level of funding (a level we could no longer afford). SUNY notified Elsevier that we would not renew the SUNY license unless Elsevier altered its pricing and cancellation policies and offered us "a better deal." The one-year license **did** buy us time to negotiate an affordable contract for 2005 and beyond and our representatives are now once again in negotiation with Elsevier.

SUNY's Requirements for a new Elsevier Contract:

SUNY's terms for a new contract include a willingness to cancel print subscriptions to Elsevier journals and rely on ELECTRONIC ONLY access to the same number of journals that we currently provide in return for a substantial reduction in cost and a reasonable rate of price inflation in each of the successive years of the contract. Other terms include a multi-year contract (3-5 years), and one invoice for the SUNY system. The downside is that our access to journal content will be dependent on Elsevier's willingness and ability to maintain their e-journal archive, at least in the short term. We will work with other research libraries to develop a long term archiving strategy. We would, of course, retain access to all content for which we have

paid, even in the event that we cancel current subscriptions. (SUNY University Center libraries could agree among themselves to retain print access to critical journals, but that issue is outside the scope of our negotiations with Elsevier.)

If our negotiations with Elsevier are to be successful, we believe that pressure will need to be applied by SUNY faculty in order to get Elsevier's attention and secure an affordable contract with Elsevier.

What faculty members at other Universities have done:

- In February 2004, faculty at Stanford University passed a resolution in February 2004 urging a shift to lower cost publishing outlets including newly emerging open access research journals.
- Faculty members at the University of California at San Francisco called for a boycott of six molecular-biology journals for which they said the publisher, Elsevier, was gouging the UC system.
- The Academic Senate at UC Santa Cruz passed a resolution calling on tenured faculty members to “give serious and careful consideration to cutting their ties with Elsevier” should contract negotiations with Elsevier fail. The resolution said faculty should consider not submitting papers to Elsevier journals, refuse to referee the submissions of others, and relinquish editorial posts on Elsevier published journals. Following these actions, the University of California system won pricing concessions for electronic access to about 1,200 of Elsevier's scientific and medical journals. The university reduced its costs from the \$8 million paid in 2003 to \$7.3 million, paying 8.7% less than the price Elsevier originally proposed, received access to additional titles not included in the prior contract, and negotiated a 5 year contract with reasonable price inflation rates in each of the five years.
- The Faculty Senate at the University of Connecticut passed a resolution encouraging “senior faculty to reduce their support of journals or publishers whose practices are inconsistent with the health of scholarly communication” and asks that the University “reward efforts by faculty, staff, and students to start or support more sustainable models for scholarly communication.”
- Cornell University and Harvard University have taken another tack by withdrawing from Elsevier's bundled pricing plan. Cornell's library dropped 170 of its Elsevier journal subscriptions, and Harvard's library has eliminated 127.
- After months of renewal negotiations with Elsevier, the Triangle Research Libraries (Duke, UNC Chapel Hill and North Carolina State University) were not able to negotiate acceptable terms and decided to discontinue their Elsevier bundled plan as well and each library will now have to cancel journals it can no longer afford and provide access to a more limited range of journals.

What can Albany faculty and SUNY faculty do to help?

Support the attached resolution and work for its passage by the University Senate.

What else can Albany faculty do to change the current conditions of scholarly communication?

- Become knowledgeable about current issues in scholarly communication and alternative models of academic publishing that support the broadest possible dissemination of peer-reviewed scholarship.
- Encourage discussion of scholarly communication issues and proposals for change in your department, schools and colleges.
- Support new publishing models that are committed to maintain access to high-quality, peer-reviewed research at a manageable cost.
- Negotiate copyright agreements with publishers. Do not sign away your rights to use your own work when you sign copyright agreements with publishers. Negotiate the right to use your own work for teaching and research, as well as for posting your research on publicly available Web site and archives.
- Empower and support your university libraries in their efforts to obtain the broadest range of appropriate research materials through purchase, license and loan at affordable prices.
- Encourage your professional societies to explore alternatives to contracting or selling their publications to commercial publishers and encourage them to maintain reasonable prices and broad access.
- Examine carefully the pricing, copyright, and subscription licensing agreements of journals you contribute to as an author, reviewer, or editor and decline your service on journals that are antithetical to a healthy scholarly communication environment.

Proposed University Senate Resolution:

Scholars publish their research to share new knowledge and promote innovation and learning. The broadest possible access to scholarly literature is vital to all members of the academic community. However, scholars, librarians and academic administrators increasingly agree that our current system of scholarly communication largely controlled by commercial publishers for their substantial financial gain is having negative budgetary consequences for our Universities and our libraries. Escalating costs of academic journals and books are making many of these products unaffordable for our institutions and putting our current system of scholarly communication in peril.

Whereas:

The Library desires to provide the broadest possible access to scholarly literature and to enhance and maintain the quality of Albany's library collections for teaching and research. However, Albany's libraries, as well as all libraries in the SUNY system, face serious financial constraints caused by reductions in State funding and the escalating prices of journals over many years.

Therefore, be it resolved:

The University Senate supports the Library's efforts to bring journal costs under control while at the same time maintaining the collection's quality.

Whereas:

Current journal costs are unsustainable and the current business models and marketing strategies of commercial publishers bear significant responsibility for those trends.

Therefore, be it resolved:

The University Senate encourages the Library and SUNY representatives to take an aggressive approach in negotiating a new contract with Elsevier, as well as other commercial publishers, to bring journal costs in line with available resources.

Whereas:

SUNY may not be able to negotiate acceptable terms with Elsevier and may decide to discontinue our contract with Elsevier. If that were to happen, access to the approximately 1,100 ScienceDirect titles currently available in the SUNY system would be considerably reduced at Albany and throughout SUNY.

Therefore, be it resolved:

In the event that a satisfactory contract with Elsevier cannot be negotiated, the University Senate supports the Library's need to select, in consultation with the faculty, Elsevier journals for cancellation to bring journal costs in line with available resources.

Whereas:

Increasing control of the publication and distribution of faculty scholarship by commercial publishers is antithetical to the core academic values of the dissemination of new knowledge and the broadest possible access to scholarship.

Therefore, be it resolved:

The University Senate encourages the Library and the faculty to explore and support alternatives to publishing scholarship with commercial publishers.

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If you have any questions or comments concerning this issue, will you please address them to either:

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