COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMITTEE ON LIBRARY AND THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIAN

June 10, 2005

Dear UCSF Faculty:

We are writing as University Librarian and Chair of the Academic Senate Committee on Library to inform you about US Congressional and professional society actions that might limit your access to information.

The American Chemical Society (ACS) is lobbying Congress to shut down PubChem, a freely available resource developed and managed by the National Library of Medicine to support the NIH Roadmap Molecular Libraries Initiative.

PubChem is a database with information on small organic molecules that can be used as chemical probes to study functions of genes, cells, and biochemical pathways. The database has 656,000 structures with substance information, compound structures, bioactivity data and integrated with other resources from the National Library of Medicine. PubChem has a small staff of 13 who work on the database. In contrast ACS’s Chemical Abstract Services, which we license as SciFinder Scholar, indexes 25 million unique chemicals along with summaries written by CAS experts and links to the chemistry journal abstracts.

A press report issued by ACS on May 23, 2005, claims that PubChem threatens the financial viability of Chemical Abstracts Service (CAS). NIH contends the databases are complimentary and any duplication is quite modest. NIH has tried to negotiate with ACS to seek a solution that would resolve the society’s concerns but ACS has broken off discussions and is seeking a solution via congressional action.

While ACS is a not-for-profit organization it operates much as a commercial publisher with over $1 billion in assets, price increases of 9% for its 30 scholarly journals and databases, and a staff of 1,300. Additionally, its CEO earned 1.025 million in 2003 and the salary for the president of publications was over $670,000. UC faculty have published over 2,300 articles in ACS journals in the past 2 1/2/ years and more than 70 UC faculty members serve as editors or editorial board members.

We call your attention to the UC Libraries Office of Scholarly Communication’s website listed below which provides considerable information including a "what you can do" section for faculty. Of interest is the statement by the Association of American Medical Colleges and the letter from Richard Roberts, 1993 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine. We encourage UCSF faculty to review the facts, discuss the issue with colleagues, and voice your concerns to ACS.

UCSF faculty have demonstrated remarkable leadership in the past around issues of scientific communications. This is another opportunity to participate in the development of a healthy system for scientific communications. This is also an opportunity to work with ACS in addressing these issues rather than a defense of the current system, which we know is not sustainable.

Please feel free to contact Karen Butter or Gail Persily if you have further questions or wish to discuss this issue further. [Adele Clarke will be out of the country until 7/21.]

Sincerely,
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Additional Information:

University of California Office of Scholarly Communications  
http://osc.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/acs_pubchem.html

PubChem  

American Chemical Society  
http://www.cas.org/acsnih/acscas_statement.pdf

Statement by the Association of American Medical Colleges  

Statement by Richard Roberts, 1993 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine  