



ACADEMIC SENATE

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COMMUNICATION FROM THE ACADEMIC SENATE AND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIAN

November 1, 2003

TO: UCSF Faculty, Department Chairs and Directors

RE: Challenges to Sustaining Subscriptions for Scholarly Publications

We would like to call to your attention that the University of California library system faces an unprecedented challenge related to the costs of online journal subscriptions that may adversely impact your academic work. There are two key elements: first, in the immediate future, there is the possibility that negotiations with one of the largest journal publishers, Elsevier, will be unsuccessful. If this is the case, it may cause the University to 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 publications: many faculty are editors of, or publish papers in, journals whose publishers are selling online access to these papers at prices that are increasing much faster than inflation. The pricing policies of some publishers are unsustainable.

The Immediate Crisis: Elsevier (<http://www.reed-elsevier.com/>)

Elsevier's SDOL is one of the largest online journal packages and the University of California is Elsevier's second largest customer. For the past four years, the UC system, through the efforts of the California Digital Library has negotiated collectively to gain access to SDOL. Last year, the systemwide cost for SDOL was \$8 million. UC San Francisco has subsequently benefited from this arrangement by gaining access to a broader range of journals than it would otherwise have been able to afford.

The costs of online journal charges, however, are increasing much faster than comparable print copy prices. Among the online publishers, Elsevier's price increases have been the most severe. Currently, access to Elsevier journals cost the University 50% of its total online budget, yet use of these journals equates to only 25% of total online journal use. At the same time, Elsevier's revenues and profits have risen significantly-- 26% within the last year.

Another important consideration is the fact that UC Faculty members are important contributors to Elsevier's journals: [10-15% of the content is written by UC faculty](#), 1000 faculty are on the editorial boards, and 150 UC faculty members are senior editors for those journals.

The University of California has been negotiating with Elsevier for seven months with the goal of establishing a sustainable relationship. However, these negotiations are not going well because Elsevier is demanding annual price increases that are two to three times the Consumer Price Index rate of inflation. Consequently, unless the University and Elsevier can arrive at a mutually acceptable price, there is a possibility that UCSF faculty and students will lose access to SDOL in 2004.

Tackling the Longer Term Issue

The UCSF Division Committee on Library has considered alternatives that UC faculty and the University might employ to ensure continued access to publications which now are available only through Elsevier journals. The Committee suggests that all UC faculty consider alternatives to publishing in and editing Elsevier journals. New initiatives, such as Public Library of Science and BioMed Central, promise high-quality peer-reviewed content at affordable prices. The Committee also suggests that faculty consider taking action by retaining certain intellectual property rights, such as including the right to post their work with an institutional repository. UC faculty can access additional information which addresses economic issues, innovations in scholarly communications and other UC efforts to sustain collections at the following site: <http://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/scholarly/>.

Proposed Resolution

Since online access to scholarly papers is increasingly important to UCSF faculty, access would be jeopardized if negotiations break down between the University of California and Elsevier (SDOL). As stated earlier, a successful resolution to these negotiations is threatened by Elsevier's insistence on increasing its charges to a level not justified by its relative utility compared with other online journal services.

Therefore, should the negotiations with Elsevier fail, the Committee on Library strongly recommends that members of the UCSF faculty give serious and careful consideration to their association with Elsevier and consider the following actions: cease submission of papers to Elsevier journals, refuse to referee the submissions of others, and relinquish editorial posts. We would encourage any UCSF faculty who elect to alter their relationship with an Elsevier journal to notify the journal of their reason for doing so.

Authors may also consider crossing out the provision in a standard publication contract that gives exclusive ownership of a published article to the publisher and thereby retain the right to publish the work in an electronic medium (e.g. UC's eScholarship Repository or others.)

If you would like additional information, please contact David Rempel (rempe@itsa.ucsf.edu) at 510-231-5720 or Karen Butter, University Librarian (karen.butter@library.ucsf.edu) at (415) 476-5557.

Sincerely,

Leonard S. Zegans, MD
Chair

David Rempel, MD, MPH
Chair – Committee on Library

Karen Butter
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cc: J. Michael Bishop, Chancellor, University of California San Francisco
Lawrence Pitts, Chair UC Academic Senate
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