

IUPUI
Resolution on Journals, Databases, and
Threats to Scholarly Publication
February 25th, 2005

Universities throughout the country are facing severe budget crises due, in large part, to the rapid escalation of subscription prices for serials. The Association of Research Libraries reports that between 1986 and 2003, average serials cost rose by 215% compared to an 82% increase in the average cost of monographs and a 68% increase in consumer prices in general. In 2003/2004, the Indiana University Library system devoted more than 75% of its acquisition budget to serial and database subscriptions. Thus the very rapid increase in serial subscription rates represents a serious drain on library resources. To the extent that the budget crisis results in the cancellation of subscriptions to important journals, the quality of education declines as does the ability of the university's scholars to contribute to the body of knowledge within their field. Ultimately, society bears a portion of this cost as the university's graduates begin their careers at less than full potential and ideas that may have contributed to society's well-being are never uncovered.

The market through which knowledge is disseminated has a variety of interesting features that distinguish it from standard markets studied by economists. The library's patrons are the end-users of the scholarly journals and yet they are not the buyers of the subscriptions and thus have little or no incentive to economize on the choice of journals that the university provides. The publishers are monopolists in the sense that they are providing a unique product: the material that appears in one journal does not appear in any other journal. Thus journals are not readily substitutable. This monopoly power allows journals to charge a premium for their subscriptions. The size of the premium rises as the stature of the journal rises. At the same time, researchers have a natural tendency to publish in journals with the highest stature regardless of their cost. The ability of high-quality journals to attract a large number of manuscripts enables them to be selective in their decisions on which manuscripts to publish and thus maintain their stature.

The monopoly power enjoyed by publishers of high-quality journals is not an issue as long as the power is not exploited. Judging from relative prices, this was the case when journals were published largely by universities and other not-for-profit organizations. During the last several decades, however, commercial publishers have entered the market in response to the increased demand for scholarly outlets to accommodate the explosion of research that has taken place. This venture has proven very profitable for these publishers because, thanks to the nature of market, subscribers have absorbed price increases with little reduction in the demand for the journals whose prices have been rising rapidly.

There is no disputing the right of a company to earn a profit when that profit derives from the provision of a service of value to society. Publishers serve a valuable purpose in providing an outlet for high-quality research while winnowing out lower-quality work. There is a sense among university librarians and faculty, however, that the for-profit publishers are exploiting their position. This view is motivated by the fact that journals produced by for-profit publishers typically command a higher subscription rate than those published by not-for-profit publishers. The view is buttressed by business practices undertaken by for-profit publishers such as "bundling" in which a price is quoted for subscriptions to a number of journals and the cancellation of any journal in the bundle triggers large increases in the subscription prices of the remaining journals.

This is contrary to the principle that knowledge, once produced, should be disseminated as broadly as possible in order to provide the greatest possible benefit to society. This principle requires a spirit of cooperation among the parties which is not likely to come about when the parties have different and irreconcilable goals. Fortunately, there is reason to hope that a situation which has grown steadily worse may be on the verge of moderating. This stems from the variety of actions currently undertaken at research institutions to combat the large price increases. Even now, there is evidence that the price increases are moderating.

Still, substantial damage has already been done as a result of the redistribution of library funds away from monographs and lower-priced journals toward those journals whose prices have risen so rapidly. While it is highly unlikely that this damage will ever be undone, the university must still adopt a set of policies and guidelines that will mitigate any further damage and perhaps reverse some of the damage that has already been done.

With this in mind, the IUPUI Library Affairs Committee offers the following resolution.

Whereas

universities and indeed, societies, thrive on the dissemination of knowledge at the lowest possible price; and

whereas,

the prices of journals produced by some publishers have risen far more rapidly than the ability of the university to purchase these subscriptions thus impinging upon the libraries' ability to serve its community by maintaining its remaining subscriptions and an up-to-date collection of monographs; and

whereas,

the maintenance of the university's collection of journals and monographs is essential to the proper training of students and the responsibility of university researchers to create ideas;

Be it resolved that:

- 1) The IUPUI libraries and administration will re-commit themselves to educating the university community on the significance of open access to knowledge to the mission of the university.
- 2) The IUPUI libraries and administration will re-commit themselves to educating the university community on the nature of the scholarly publication market and its impact on the ability of the university libraries to provide current, relevant materials to all of their constituencies.
- 3) The IUPUI libraries will make readily available to faculty and staff subscription rates and publishers of all of the journals to which the university subscribes.
- 4) An individual may, after consulting with relevant individuals in the department and school, ~~refuse to~~ choose not to serve on the editorial board of a journal whose business practices are considered detrimental to the overall well-being of their field of study. This individual will not be penalized with regard to tenure, promotion, or salary increases.
- 5) An individual may, after consulting with relevant individuals in the department and school, ~~refuse to~~ refuse choose not to submit his or her work to a journal whose business practices are considered detrimental to the overall well-being of their field of study. This philosophy must be adopted on a long-term basis and, if so, the individual will not be penalized with regard to tenure, promotion, or salary increases, as long as the quality of the work can be established through peer review.
- 6) For decisions regarding tenure, promotion, or salary increases, and following IUPUI tenure and promotion guidelines, significant appropriate weight will be given to the active promotion of open access by a faculty or staff member through the creation of an on-line journal or any other portal designed to collect knowledge from others and then disseminate that knowledge to a wider audience in their field.
- 7) The university libraries will promote the development of open access by IUPUI employees by actively assisting any individual who wishes to develop a conduit as described in point 6.

- 8) The university libraries, in consultation with faculty and staff, will review their lists of subscriptions with the goal of eliminating those journals with minimal readership on campus.
- 9) The university libraries, after consulting with affected faculty and staff, will pursue a strategy for negotiating rates on subscriptions with a special emphasis on those journals whose price is already inordinately high or whose price is rising substantially more rapidly than the median rate increase.
- 10) The university libraries will commit themselves to cost-savings by judiciously eliminating duplicate print/on-line subscriptions wherever feasible.
- 11) The university libraries will actively seek out and explore opportunities for collective action with other universities in dealing with publishers.