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Major Periodical Subscriptions Cannot Be Sustained

To: Faculty Members in all Schools, Faculties, and Units
From: [The Faculty Advisory Council](#)
Date: April 17, 2012
RE: Periodical Subscriptions

We write to communicate an untenable situation facing the Harvard Library. Many large journal publishers have made the scholarly communication environment fiscally unsustainable and academically restrictive. This situation is exacerbated by efforts of certain publishers (called "providers") to acquire, bundle, and increase the pricing on journals.

Harvard's annual cost for journals from these providers now approaches \$3.75M. In 2010, the comparable amount accounted for more than 20% of *all* periodical subscription costs and just under 10% of *all* collection costs for everything the Library acquires. Some journals cost as much as \$40,000 per year, others in the tens of thousands. Prices for online content from two providers have increased by about 145% over the past six years, which far exceeds not only the consumer price index, but also the higher education and the library price indices. These journals therefore claim an ever-increasing share of our overall collection budget. Even though scholarly output continues to grow and publishing can be expensive, profit margins of 35% and more suggest that the prices we must pay do not solely result from an increasing supply of new articles.

The Library has never received anything close to full reimbursement for these expenditures from overhead collected by the University on grant and research funds.

The Faculty Advisory Council to the Library, representing university faculty in all schools and in consultation with the Harvard Library leadership, reached this conclusion: major periodical subscriptions, especially to electronic journals published by historically key providers, cannot be sustained: continuing these subscriptions on their current footing is financially untenable. Doing so would seriously erode collection efforts in many other areas, already compromised.

It is untenable for contracts with at least two major providers to continue on the basis identical with past agreements. Costs are now prohibitive. Moreover, some providers bundle many journals as one subscription, with major, high-use journals bundled in with journals consulted far less frequently. Since the Library now must change its subscriptions and since faculty and graduate students are chief users, please consider the following options open to faculty and students (F) and the Library (L), state other options you think viable, and [communicate your views](#):

1. Make sure that all of your own papers are accessible by submitting them to DASH in accordance with the faculty-initiated open-access policies (F).
2. Consider submitting articles to open-access journals, or to ones that have reasonable, sustainable subscription costs; move prestige to open access (F).
3. If on the editorial board of a journal involved, determine if it can be published as open access material, or independently from publishers that practice pricing described above. If not, consider resigning (F).
4. Contact professional organizations to raise these issues (F).
5. Encourage professional associations to take control of scholarly literature in their field or shift the management of their e-journals to library-friendly organizations (F).
6. Encourage colleagues to consider and to discuss these or other options (F).
7. Sign contracts that unbundle subscriptions and concentrate on higher-use journals (L).
8. Move journals to a sustainable pay per use system, (L).
9. Insist on subscription contracts in which the terms can be made public (L).

See coverage:

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