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Open Access

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Open Access

Abstract

“Would you like to open a subscription to this journal?”

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During my summer research I saw a lot of these windows pop up on my computer screen. One dead end followed by another. I grew weary of not having access to the studies that were highly pertinent to my area of research. Although my frustrations were never abated, I accepted this as my reality. I’ve acquiesced to the idea that my future as a researcher will be filled with endless hours of staring at a computer screen constantly telling me “No you may not read this article.” [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, open access, serial crisis

Disciplines

Education | Library and Information Science | Scholarly Communication | Scholarly Publishing

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](https://www.gettysburg.edu) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

OPEN ACCESS

October 20, 2014

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During my summer research I saw a lot of these windows pop up on my computer screen. One dead end followed by another. I grew weary of not having access to the studies that were highly pertinent to my area of research. Although my frustrations were never abated, I accepted this as my reality. I've acquiesced to the idea that my future as a researcher will be filled with endless hours of staring at a computer screen constantly telling me “No you may not read this article.”

But why should I accept this? In an age of increased global connections and instant gratification offered by the internet, why am I still blocked from consequential and substantial scientific data?

Publishing is expensive in terms of printing and distributing, so researchers began using journals to take over some of these costs. With increased digitization, one would assume that access to these papers should be easier, however that is not the case. The “serial crisis” as it is called, is the result of journals acting as monopolists. Each journal is publishing unique information, therefore they have the ability to hike up prices since each individual research project is different and important in its own respect. It should be noted that the researchers and peer-reviewers aren't paid by the publisher, the money is simply lining the pockets of the publishing company and the various stockholders invested in the company.

How can educational institutions keep up with rising costs without having to cut journals out of their databases? If an institution with a massive endowment such as Harvard can't even keep up with the rising costs, how is a small, liberal arts institution such as Gettysburg. It seems counterintuitive to lock information away behind price barriers when the point of doing research is to spread knowledge. Not only that, but it is unjust because it perpetuates a system where access depends on wealth and privilege.



There is a solution to the problem, and it is gaining support in the world of academia, albeit a slow growing support. Open Access: free access to information around the world. Open Access allows researchers to publish their work in a database that all people have access to, not just subscribers. This means other scientists, students, those who have not gone through higher education, and economically disadvantaged individuals all have access to these resources. Websites such as arXiv.org and plosone.org are some of the leading Open Access databases of scientific literature.

Although it sounds like a fairly simple solution, there is resistance. Some people feel that this is just the way of the world, those who have access to the resources have access to information. Why fix the system if it isn't broken? (And for the publishing industry that makes billions a year from academic journals, the system is definitely not broken.) Furthermore, there seems to be a stigma attached to Open Access. In a field where success is measured by the number of articles published in highly regarded (and expensive) academic journals, Open Access may be looked upon as watering down the research and the prestige that comes with publication.

Whatever the reasons behind the resistance are, it is important to recognize that the system is broken. However, we have become so accustomed to this injustice due to the consistent access that our college allows us, it doesn't even register with us. Now that researchers around the world have the opportunity to be constantly connected, their ideas and findings should also be connected on a global scale, rather than being locked up behind an "Access Denied" pop-up window. If the purpose of science is to "advance knowledge for the benefit of all humanity" (Professor Richard Russell, personal communication), shouldn't research be distinguished by how many people believe it is important to their field and how well it was designed rather than how locked up and protected it is from the average person?

Fortunately, awareness is spreading and Open Access journals are becoming more commonplace. The librarians at Gettysburg College are working on a database that encompasses all Gettysburg College research for free. "[The Cupola](#)" started in Spring 2012 and now encompasses works from about 508 disciplines. From student research to lectures given by professors, "The Cupola" is becoming an incredible database, giving access to countless individuals, including those who are not affiliated with the college.

[Open Access Week](#) is this week. I urge you to attend some of the lectures and events to further educate yourself on this topic. Whether or not you want to believe it, this issue affects you, as well as many others around the world. This issue reaches much further than struggling to find literature while writing a last minute research paper. [Knowledge is power](#) in today's society, and there are too many people in the world without access to vital information. How is society expected to progress if not everyone is allowed to view key research. In the world of academia there is a certain privilege we have, but those who are not involved in higher education, those who do not have the ability to go online and access a pre-paid database, and those who do not have access to computers and the internet still deserve to be informed. It is an issue that spans further than our college's walls, and is impacting everyone around the world, and education is the key to effective social change.

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