



2-27-2013

Information - Access: Denied

Riccardo M. Purita
Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/surge>

 Part of the [Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons](#), [Educational Sociology Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), [Information Literacy Commons](#), [Liberal Studies Commons](#), [Online and Distance Education Commons](#), [Scholarly Communication Commons](#), and the [Scholarly Publishing Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Purita, Riccardo M., "Information - Access: Denied" (2013). *SURGE*. 134.
<https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/surge/134>

This is the author's version of the work. This publication appears in Gettysburg College's institutional repository by permission of the copyright owner for personal use, not for redistribution. Cupola permanent link: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/surge/134>

This open access blog post is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

Information - Access: Denied

Abstract

I have been privileged during my lifetime to always have the opportunity to learn about something if I wanted to. When I became interested in music and psychology—or even when I was learning how to apply for college—I googled it. The resources to obtain information have always been there for me: access to computers, the internet, books, journals. It is hard to imagine my life without a computer or access to books to learn about the world, and even harder to imagine if I did not know how to read or write. For this, I can thank my education and the money that provided this education. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, open access, peer-review, paywalls, unrestricted access, scholarly communications

Disciplines

Curriculum and Social Inquiry | Education | Educational Sociology | Higher Education | Information Literacy | Liberal Studies | Library and Information Science | Online and Distance Education | Scholarly Communication | Scholarly Publishing

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) 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

INFORMATION – ACCESS: DENIED

February 27, 2013

I have been privileged during my lifetime to always have the opportunity to learn about something if I wanted to. When I became interested in music and psychology—or even when I was learning how to apply for college—I googled it. The resources to obtain information have always been there for me: access to computers, the internet, books, journals. It is hard to imagine my life without a computer or access to books to learn about the world, and even harder to imagine if I did not know how to read or write. For this, I can thank my education and the money that provided this education.

Last month, Aaron Swartz, a computer programmer and internet activist, committed suicide. He was a part of the Open-Access Movement, which has pushed for unrestricted access of peer-reviewed research. In 2010, Swartz downloaded 4.8 million documents from the academic database, JSTOR. He faced up to 35 years in prison for doing so, but the charges were settled in June of 2011. What Aaron Swartz wanted was for everyone to have the chance to obtain information. This noble idea often gets lost to those who already have access to educational resources. For me, it had not been something I really thought about until I read Swartz's "[Guerilla Open Access Manifesto](#)." In it, Swartz calls for action against the privatization of information. When discussing scholarly articles he writes,

Those with access to these resources — students, librarians, scientists — you have been given a privilege. You get to feed at this banquet of knowledge while the rest of the world is locked out. But you need not — indeed, morally, you cannot — keep this privilege for yourselves. You have a duty to share it with the world.

At universities—including Gettysburg College—students have access to many scholarly journals. If there is a book or article that the library database does not have, we can often find who in the world does have it and request to get it ourselves. This became the norm for me, so I never noticed that it was indeed a privilege. I have the privilege to find a scholarly article online and access more than just the abstract. I have the privilege to see words like “this text is free to you” or “Your access provided by Gettysburg College.” There has been more than



one occasion when a librarian has urged me to take advantage of our database because I pay for it and I will not have access to it forever.

But why? Why do only those who have the money to pay for a college education have the luxury of reading the research being done in the world? Why do I only have access to this information when I am in a system of education already? If one needs to pay for this information, wealth then becomes directly correlated with learning. The desire and drive to learn becomes irrelevant if you do not have the money to access the information. You are stuck: stuck without access to information or the ability to gain it. Limiting this access continues to create a widening gap between socioeconomic classes. Not to mention, institutions like Gettysburg College pay [thousands of dollars](#) to access research that is tax-payer funded. And a large portion of that money goes straight into the [pockets of shareholders](#) for that particular journal. In a nutshell, the excessive amounts of money an institution spends to access information goes directly to people who are already wealthy.

Information is power.

And it continues to come to those who already maintain privilege. We are adhering to a system where the poor are being locked out of even having the opportunity to learn. Would we allow for public libraries to ask for a cover charge before being able to read their books? I don't think so.

I do not think that many people who do have greater access to information are trying to keep the knowledge to themselves. We simply want to learn and are taking advantage of the resources we have. But I think it is important to be aware that not everyone has this access in the first place. And the gap between those that have privilege to access information and those that don't is only widening. Public library budgets have been decreasing for years, while the subscription rates for scholarly journals are [increasing](#). Information is becoming more and more exclusive.

So ask yourselves: *should knowledge be a business?* I understand that these databases do a great service and a lot of work is put into them, but what kind of world are we building that prevents certain individuals from having the hope and opportunity to learn? Would you have even had the opportunity to be sitting where you are now at Gettysburg College if you didn't have that privilege?

Riccardo Purita '13
Contributing Writer

<http://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com/2013/02/27/information-access-denied/>