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## What Collaboration Means to Us: Access Is Lost - What now?

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## *What Collaboration Means to Us*

### What Collaboration Means to Us: Access Is Lost - What Now?

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#### **Abstract**

In this column we describe the actions taken by the University of California, Davis Library to support and to communicate with the campus research community after the suspension of access to Elsevier's ScienceDirect platform.

Keywords: transformative publishing agreements, communication

#### **Introduction**

Librarians regularly collaborate with faculty on collection development, student information literacy, scholarly communication, and other library services to provide the best support for teaching, learning, and research. Regular communication and collaboration also create an atmosphere of trust, which is most important in situations that require difficult decisions. One such situation is the University of California's negotiation with the publisher Elsevier about a transformative Publish & Read (P&R) agreement. In this short piece, we describe how the Library engaged with the University of California Davis (UC Davis) community and what actions were taken when the University of California and Elsevier failed to reach an agreement in negotiations to renew access to Elsevier's ScienceDirect after December 2018.

#### **The Starting Point**

The University of California (UC) is committed to accelerating the pace of scientific discovery by ensuring that research produced by UC's ten campuses – which accounts for nearly 10 percent of all publishing output in the United States<sup>1</sup> – is immediately available to the world, without cost to the reader. Over the past couple of years, the UC libraries and the California Digital Library (CDL), which provides library services at the UC system level, have negotiated with publishers to advance the twin goals of cost containment and open access.

To reach these goals, a UC Publisher Strategy and Negotiations Task Force, representing UC's faculty University Committee on Library and Scholarly Communication, the Council of University Librarians, and the California Digital Li-



brary, entered into negotiations for P&R agreements with major (and smaller) academic publishers. The Task Force worked in close consultation with UC libraries and the UC Academic Senate. In seeking P&R agreements, the UC joined with library consortia worldwide to transform scholarly publishing into an Open Access system. At the time of writing, UC had finalized P&R agreements with Cambridge University Press and several smaller publishers. Talks with other publishers are ongoing and on a promising path.

The UC "big deal" subscription to Elsevier's journals on the ScienceDirect platform expired on January 1, 2019, and negotiations for a P&R agreement with this publisher were ongoing during 2018. However, these talks have paused and, as was widely reported, UC lost access to journal content published from 2019 and after, including formerly subscribed titles as well as the access-only Freedom Collection; full-text access to pre-2019 ScienceDirect publications that had been part of the subscribed-to list continued. Several actions were taken by the UC Davis library to support our campus community.

The University of California, Davis, typically enrolls more than 38,000 students and employs the full-time equivalent of 4,100 faculty along with other academics and researchers. It boasts a major academic health system and over two dozen specialized research centers. Recognized as one of the top ten public universities in the United States, and the number one university in the world for veterinary medicine and in the nation for agricultural research,<sup>2</sup> UC Davis offers interdisciplinary graduate study and more than one hundred undergraduate majors in four colleges – Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Biological Sciences, Engineering, and Letters and Science. It also houses six professional schools – Education, Law, Management, Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, and Nursing.

As can be expected, the loss of access to current research poses a challenge for researchers, especially in the STEM and health science disciplines. Elsevier is one of the major publishers in these areas, and many high ranking journals in STEM and health science are part of its portfolio. Given the impact of the loss of access to recently published research to our community, UC Davis Library initiated a number of activities designed to be transparent about the state of negotiations with Elsevier, to keep the community informed, and to support access alternatives.

## The Library Response

### *Finding Alternatives*

Interlibrary loan (ILL) is an essential component of library services for students, clinicians, and researchers. When negotiations stalled, campuses in the UC system worked together to improve the shared forms used to request items not available in their home libraries via UC-eLinks, the link resolver SFX software. The UC Davis library made several improvements to the ILL service, and the Access and Delivery Services (ADS) department stepped up its document delivery operations to be ready for an anticipated increase in the number of articles ordered. The Library joined the RapidILL community and signed up with Reprints Desk. ILL software programs were updated, and work processes were reviewed and revised to ensure continued high-quality service. ADS extended the number of hours staff were assigned to processing requests to include weekends and days when the Library was closed to the public to provide fast and consistent service to our users.

Immediate access to research articles is now standard practice, so we recognized that speedy request fulfillment was crucial to our service. UCD ILL colleagues were able to fulfill most orders for Elsevier content within 48 hours or less (77 percent in 24 hours, another 14 percent in 48 hours, in the period from July 2019 to March

2020). Articles noted for patient care were obtained from Reprints Desk to support the needs of clinicians who care for our human and animal patients. Throughout the past year, and despite the campus and library closure due to the COVID-19 crisis, the ADS ILL team managed to ensure timely access to current research.

To further support alternative access, a small team of librarians provided information about online tools and services useful for finding and obtaining legal Open Access versions of paywalled articles. The team highlighted Unpaywall, Kopernio, and other services designed to discover these versions in institutional or subject repositories, and the Library promoted these services on its website. The team created short instructional videos (which to date have been viewed over 500 times) and offered walk-in as well as online training on these tools.

#### *Keeping Our Community Up-To-Date*

Equally important to providing access alternatives is communication with our community about the situation with Elsevier. In late 2018, the UCD library convened its own Transformative Agreement Group to meet regularly. The group considered the Library's communication plan with the campus community, actions the Library could take to facilitate access to research for our users, and outlooks based on information from the system-wide UC Transformative Agreement Implementation Group. Involvement in various UC-level committees and working groups helped ensure close contact and (when required) coordination with other campuses. The University Librarian and Associate University Librarians attended meetings within the academic units to provide updates and overviews on the negotiations, the cut-off, and alternative access. The group evaluated the feedback provided through a dedicated email address, as well as through librarian-user communications. Emails were immediately answered, often by a

team member with the most substantial connection to the sender. The Library broadly disseminated informational emails, open letters, and other announcements to keep the UC Davis community informed about the status of the negotiations. The library homepage featured a prominent banner that linked to information about the Elsevier cut-off, to alternative access, and to a newly created dedicated email address for questions, complaints, or expressions of support. After several months the link to Elsevier information was moved to a different location on the Library's homepage to reserve the banner for emergencies such as the COVID-19 crisis.

#### *Checking in with users*

UC Davis has a School of Medicine, a School of Veterinary Medicine, a College of Biological Sciences, and a College for Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, and a large number of reputable journals in these areas are published by Elsevier. The Academic Senate and individual faculty by and large have supported the goal to have a Publish & Read agreement with Elsevier (and with other publishers). To ensure the lines of communication remained open, in February 2020, members of the Transformative Agreement group consulted with members of our community to better understand their views. Overall, members of our community indicated that while lack of access has impacted their work, generally, they support UC's twin goals of cost containment and open access. As the spring quarter comes to a close, another open letter to the UCD community is being planned. The team wants to update the community about any new agreements or other notable developments regarding UC's negotiations with Elsevier and other publishers.

#### **Final Note**

All challenges are also opportunities, and collaborating with our users in such a difficult situa-



tion provided an opportunity to enhance the relationship between the Library and our community. While the hope is that the situation is unique, the Transformative Agreement team has put to the test many communication principles and found them to be valuable. For example, communicate, communicate, communicate; the team used multiple communication channels, and responded quickly when there was news to

share or users requested information or had questions. With negotiations continuing at the time of writing, we have already learned that transparency, consistent messaging, and the best possible support is benefitting relationships between the Library and users, even in difficult times.

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<sup>1</sup> University of California, "Accountability Report 2019", <https://accountability.universityofcalifornia.edu/2019/chapters/chapter-9.html#9.1.4> (last accessed 5/5/2020)

<sup>2</sup> University of California Davis, Rankings, <https://www.ucdavis.edu/about/rankings> (last accessed 5/5/2020)