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:

Chronicle of Higher Education
Inside Higher Education
The Atlantic
» Library Staff Members Join Harvard IT Summit
» Library Welcomes HR Colleague
» Call for Participation: Resource Sharing Workflow Analysis
» Board Approves Charge to Develop Collection and Content Development Strategic Plan
» Sniffin-Marinoff Named Overseer of USS Constitution Museum
» A Note from Helen Shenton and Mary Lee Kennedy
» Library Overview Page Updated
» Project Update: Tell Us
» The Transit of Venus: It Wasn't 2014, It Was 1801
» Call for Participation: Project Update: Developing a Shared Services Operating Model
» Library Convenes University Conservation Community
» Library Project Update: Digital Scholarship Site Available in May
» New E-Resources Available in May
» The Transit of Venus: It Wasn't 2014, It Was 1801
» Call for Participation: Project Update: Dataverse Pilot
» Library Project Update: New Library Convening: Community
» Library Project Update: Digital Scholarship Site
» Library Project Update: New Library Convening: Community
» Library Project Update: Digital Scholarship Site
» Library Early Access Services Process Mapping
» Speaker Series Continues with "Digital Transformations of Research"
* Library Early Access Services Process Mapping
* Speaker Series Continues with "Digital Transformations of Research"
Retirement Program Concludes

» Harvard Library Board Resolution

» Library Announces Several New Staff Appointments

» New E-Resources Available in April

» Harvard Library Names Two to New Positions

» Library Launches Student Engagement Pilot Project

» Millions of Harvard Library Catalog Records Publicly Available

» New Andover-Harvard Theological Librarian Announced

» "The Armenians and the Book" Exhibit at Lamont Library

» Library Tech Joins HUIT on April 20

» Faculty Advisory Council Memorandum on Journal Pricing

» Harvard Library Explorer Debuts at Cabot

» Library Staff Invited to Innovation Unconference

» Lamont Open 24/7 for Reading Period and Exams

» Thomson Reuters InCites Available May 1

» Save the Date: Innovation Initiative Unconference

» New E-Resources Available in March

» Project Update: New Library Portal

» Library Recruitment Update

» The Library Welcomes New Team Members
» Library Staff Invited to Join Interview Panels

» Zittrain and Wones to Lead Harvard Law School Library

» Speaker Series Continues with Session on Open Access

» Harvard Library to Deposit Additional Volumes in HathiTrust

» Sessions with Heads of Shared Services

» New E-Resources Available in February

» Dean's Distinction Awards Honor HCL’s Hussein, Kornilowicz, and Sheridan

» Harvard Library Affinity Group Heads Selected

» New Collection Development Listserv

» Robert Darnton Receives National Humanities Medal


» President Faust’s Reflections on the Future of the Harvard Library, February 8, 2012

» New E-Resources Available in January

» Geospatial Library Offers Seamless Access to GIS Repositories

» Transition Update from the Senior Associate Provost and the Executive Director

» Harvard Judaica Division Publications Now Online

» Transition Update from the Senior Associate Provost and the Executive Director

» Harvard Library eReader Pilot Program Launched
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» Library Director of Communications Announced

» Series of Open Forums for Library Staff Announced

» Library Director of Human Resources Named

» Mary Lee Kennedy Speaks at 'Strategic Conversations' Kickoff

» Letter from Provost Alan Garber

» Answering Questions about the Library Transition

» Library Transition Slides: Sept. 28, 2011

» Q&A with Scott Wicks

» Video Update about Strategic Conversations

» Letter from Mary Lee Kennedy

» Library Transition: Design Phase Team

» Shared Services Staff Update

» Chief Financial Officer of the Harvard Library Named

» Harvard Library Names Head of Preservation and Digital Imaging Services

» Head of Information and Technical Services Announced

» Q&A with Matthew Sheehy

» Matthew Sheehy Named Head of Access Services

» Early Progress in Planning the "Year of Public Conversations"

» Recruitment Update from the Executive Director