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## **Reshaping scholarly communication: Why faculty are adopting institutional open access policies**

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On May 21<sup>st</sup> the Academic Senate of the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) voted to make electronic versions of current and future scientific articles freely available to the public. The unanimous faculty vote made UCSF the largest scientific institution in the nation to adopt an open access (OA) policy and among the first public universities to do so. While the issues are complex, our motivation was simple: the predominant system for scholarly communication has become economically unsustainable, restrictive, and critically limited in its ability to disseminate our research.

Our faculty have come to realize that while there remains a need to access increasing amounts of scholarly materials, the costs of purchasing such materials continue to rise exponentially due largely to aggressive practices of many commercial publishers who extract billions of dollars in profits every year from the business of scholarly communication. Traditional “fee-for-access” publishing models restrict the distribution of scholarly publications to those who can afford subscriptions or per-article download prices. Across its

ten-campus system, the University of California (UC) spends close to \$40 million dollars annually to access scholarly materials, including the work of UC authors that we give away to publishers for free. Most other universities and especially the taxpaying public have substantially less access, and thus our research is not achieving its full impact or reaching its entire audience. Even if we had unlimited amounts of money and could keep up with the pricing of commercial publishers, we believe there are other reasons to transform the current system of scholarly communication.

Accordingly, we at UCSF worked closely with colleagues from other campuses to develop an OA policy that we hope will also be adopted across the UC system. This policy is very similar to those already in place at more than 140 other peer Institutions, including Harvard, MIT, Duke, and Princeton. Although these policies vary in some details, at their core they operate in the same way: by default faculty grant their institution permission (a non-exclusive license) to disseminate their scholarship freely and immediately through an open-access repository. When necessary, faculty can deny or delay this permission (that is, trigger a waiver of the license and/or policy) for any specific work. The implications of a UC system-wide OA policy cannot be overstated, as we generate around 50,000 journal articles every year, which is more than 3% of all annual publications worldwide. The [California Digital Library](#) (CDL) is supporting our repository as part of its [eScholarship](#) service.

Questions I am often asked are, “have we now achieved our objectives, when will faculty and the public see any benefits, and how have the commercial publishers responded?” I can answer by saying that our OA Policy has already been an overwhelming success. First

of all, UCSF publishes an average of 4,500 peer reviewed, primary research articles every year. That's about 375 per month. Since the policy was passed at the end of May, we have had 108 requests for waivers and embargoes. If you do the math, that's six month's worth, which is on average 18 waiver/embargo requests a month. Most significantly, this number represents less than 5% of the total scholarly output for UCSF on a monthly basis. That means that 95% of our scholarship is being published without waivers or embargoes and can be instantly and freely available to the public and other scholars. Incidentally, these percentages are similar to those seen by our colleagues at Harvard and MIT where waivers also average 5-6% of total scholarly output.

Second, the policy has markedly advanced our dialog with commercial publishers. When the policy passed, we sent out well over a hundred letters formally notifying publishers about what they should now expect from UCSF faculty authors. The majority of publishers, who have responded, have indicated that they will comply with the policy. A few have raised objections or have asked for additional clarification about what they can do to be compliant. Most significantly, with some publishers, we have had dialogues that would have been out of the question before the policy passed. In August, we held a meeting with top executives from Elsevier who came to UCSF specifically to have us help them navigate the policy and talk about our future relationship. All of a sudden, we had the ear of Elsevier where we seemingly did not have it before (excluding when UCSF faculty threatened a potential boycott of Cell Press/Elsevier back in [2003](#)). As we know, Elsevier's publishing division made \$1.2 billion in profits in 2011 with a 36% profit margin, and they have had little incentive to have any discussions with us except about raising our licensing costs every few

years. So apparently Elsevier appears to be more willing to talk now that others and we have passed OA policies.

A further example of how faculty action can prompt change is with the Nature Publishing Group (NPG). We have been in an ongoing and regular dialog with NPG for more than two years after leading a potential UC system-wide faculty boycott of NPG in [2010](#) that brought NPG to the table. NPG had threatened to raise our licensing costs by more than \$1M in one year, but because of our actions, this proposed increase was rescinded. So this has been a great success and more importantly has prompted NPG to have internal deliberations concerning their business model and ways to build a more sustainable and mutually beneficial publishing system. In fact, Annette Thomas, who was a former Editor of *Nature*, Managing Director of NPG, and currently is the CEO of Macmillan, which is the parent company for NPG, just spent two days with us in San Francisco to discuss among other topics our OA policy, the process of peer review, and commercial publishing more broadly. Again, this probably would not have happened if UCSF had not shown some leadership (and our faculty some courage) on these issues. And finally, we have had a similar dialog with the publisher of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS), who has also for some unexpected reason been requesting waivers. Because of our discussions, we remain hopeful that PNAS will revisit the language of their author agreements to become compliant with institutional OA policies especially since many of their National Academy members are directly affected.

Also evident, based on my conversations with different faculty in the hallways or at campus meetings, is the newfound awareness that faculty have about their author rights and the access to their own work, and how the choices they make about where they publish affects those rights and access. More faculty now understand that the new ways of publishing and disseminating their scholarship have tremendous advantages over the old system and they are embracing OA journals such as *PLoS*, *eLife*, *PeerJ*, and others. This has not gone unnoticed by publishers of high prestige journals such as *Nature* and *Cell*, who are trying to keep up by making their own OA brands. Again, I see this all as a positive outcome that will ultimately lead to more and more public access.

Another benefit of passing our policy is that our actions have emboldened other institutions. For example, I just came back from the University of Calgary where I was helping faculty develop an OA policy of their own so that they can lead the charge in Canada. And I have been giving talks at other places for the same reason. This is a global movement that initially will require some individual sacrifices and inconveniences for faculty up front, but with far-reaching and positive rewards for academia and society at large in the end. As part of our policy we have committed to develop a system for implementation that will minimize any administrative burden on our faculty. We are working with publishers who are willing to make automatic deposits into our repository on behalf of faculty like some currently do for PubMed Central. And CDL and eScholarship have built an easy system to manage workflow for deposits, addenda, embargoes, and waivers that takes less than a minute per transaction. So we have made solid progress thus far.

One good sign that the policy is working is that it can feel like a confession when faculty disclose to me that they didn't want to ask their publisher for a waiver—that they think they are compromising what we all worked so hard to achieve. I tell faculty, who choose to submit articles to publishers that don't accept our OA policy, that they still have the power to eliminate waivers. We can be firm with publishers because publishers need us as authors, editors, and peer-reviewers more than we need them. Faculty can start by asking publishers to modify their author agreements to be compliant with our OA policy, and if that doesn't work use whatever leverage they have as authors, editors, and peer-reviewers to pressure and/or shame non-compliant publishers, especially since the vast majority of their competitors already accept our policy. Finally, if faculty are so inclined, they can always tell publishers that such non-compliance may affect future decisions about where to publish (and I know they already have).

Most importantly, I believe our OA policy has changed the culture and expectations at UCSF around the issue of scholarly communication. Faculty now see clearly that the old system is not only broken, but that it benefits the commercial publishers egregiously and limits access to our own work unjustifiably. As faculty who freely provide the content, peer-review, and editorship that sustains traditional commercial publishing, we now find ourselves giving momentum to a new system that allows us to keep control of our own work and disseminates our research widely. Such a transformation heartens those of us who must perpetually publish or perish.