

Subject: Re: Public Access to Peer-Reviewed Scholarly Publications Resulting From Federally Funded Research

Date: January 9, 2012 12:11:50 PM EST

Dear Office of Science Technology and Policy,

I am writing to provide additional information in support of my original letter regarding open access.

According to an article in The Economist, Elsevier's profits in 2010 were \$1.1 billion, and they enjoyed a profit margin of 36% (<http://www.economist.com/node/18744177/>). Divided by the world's total scholarly output of 1.5 million articles per year, that comes out to about \$730 per article. Right now the publication fee at PLoS ONE, the most visible but hardly the only open-access journal, is \$1350.

So the pure profit--not counting any other revenue--of Elsevier alone could fund 60% of the global scholarly output at PLoS ONE's rate, which presumably includes some institutional overhead in addition to the cost of publication itself. If the profits from Springer, Nature Publishing Group, and other commercial publishers were added to Elsevier's, they would greatly exceed the cost of all scholarly publishing, worldwide. No industry should be allowed to deny the results of publicly-funded research to the taxpayers who funded it, especially not one that is already posting such immense profits.

Furthermore, as Peter Murray-Rust of the University of Cambridge has argued, closed access means people die:

- Information is a key component of health-care
- Closed access publishers make money by restricting access to information.
- The worse the medicine and healthcare, etc. the more people die.

In a publicly-posted blog comment (<http://svpow.wordpress.com/2011/10/22/economics-of-open-source-publishing/#comment-11702>), Dr. Murray-Rust argued,

"To clarify the discussion of:

'closed access means people die'This applies to ALL scientific publication.

If you are an engineer and want to be sure that a new material is safe for a medical device you need to read the literature.

If you are a policy wonk and worried about epidemics you need to know the mathematics of epidemiology (maybe in a stats or maths journal).

If you are trying to improve the drainage in tropical counfries you need to know about the sociology of cooperation and conflict over water.

If you are worried about obesity you need to know about the psychology of human behaviour.

And that's just medical.

I was in two earthquakes last week (in Berkeley). Small ones. But I would like to know that everyone involved in prevention and warning could read the appropriate literature.

There is NO discipline which can be regarded as irrelevant to the benefit of humankind."

Please consider all of this carefully, and thank you for your time and attention.

Best,

Mathew Wedel