

9 November 2004

Dear Pubs Council member--

In early August 2004, I sent all Publications Council members an email to encourage them to recommend to the Governing Board that articles published in ESA journals since 1999 be made freely accessible on the Internet two years after publication.

That email (now posted at <http://tjwalker.ifas.ufl.edu/esaepub.htm#2004>) gave the background for such a recommendation and described its costs and benefits.

The responses were generally positive except that Alan Kahan noted that a potential agreement with JSTOR might provide a fiscal incentive for maintaining restricted access to articles in _all_ back issues.

This email is to support entering into a contract with JSTOR for digitizing all pre-1999 articles in ESA journals and to speak against maintaining barriers to articles that are already digitized and more than two years old.

WHY ESA SHOULD LET JSTOR DIGITIZE ALL PRE-1999 ARTICLES

By scanning pre-1999 articles and optically character reading the scans, JSTOR will make the articles full-text searchable and available on the web in PDF format. Those working at the many institutions that subscribe to JSTOR will be able to use the web to find, read, and print any ESA article published prior to the start of ESA's web versions of its journals.

The advantages of JSTOR can be illustrated by the Florida Entomological Society's back-issue project, in which it did JSTOR-like scanning of pre-1994 back issues of the Florida Entomologist. The result is that all articles ever published in the Florida Entomologist, from 1917 to date, are full-text searchable, retrievable, and freely accessible at <http://www.fcla.edu/FlaEnt/>.

WHY ESA SHOULD MAKE LATER ARTICLES OPENLY ACCESSIBLE AFTER A TWO-YEAR EMBARGO

The articles from 1999 to date are already digitized. As described in my previous email, making them openly accessible will cost little, and the benefits to authors and to entomology are significant.

If ESA members were polled relative to making articles freely accessible after a two-year embargo, I believe they would vote overwhelmingly in favor. One basis for this belief is that, in 1999, I circulated a petition that asked the Governing Board to provide free Web access to all articles in ESA's traditionally published journals no more than two years after publication. Within one month, more than 100 ESA members signed the petition. Five years later, the costs of making articles openly accessible are less and the advantages of open access are better understood by the researchers who write the articles and by the institutions that fund the research. (To see the petition and the explanation that accompanied it, use the links at <http://tjwalker.ifas.ufl.edu/esaepub.htm#1999>).

I believe many ESA members would be distressed to learn that their society, which has led the way in offering its authors the opportunity to buy immediate free access to their articles, would oppose taking advantage of the web's ability to make already digitized articles freely accessible after two years at low cost.

If you are familiar with the pending NIH proposal that articles based on NIH-funded research be made openly accessible after no more than a six-month embargo, you may see the relevance of the following three paragraphs to ESA's decision on allowing free access to articles after a two-year embargo:

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Publishers who object to this loss of control are defending the remarkable proposition that they should control access to research conducted by others, written up by others, and funded by taxpayers. More: they claim that they should control access to this literature even when it is given to them free of charge and even though the prices they demand for it have risen four times faster than inflation for nearly two decades.

If we let publishers control access to this knowledge, then the toll will continue to grow faster than inflation. Even if it didn't, or even if the prices were low and reasonable, the present system wouldn't scale, since the growth of published knowledge itself would quickly put the total price out of reach, creating access barriers based on the accident of user wealth. We want to remedy information overload, but we want to do it with smart tools that help us find the subset of information we need, not with crude policies that set off huge swaths of it, relevant and irrelevant alike, as too expensive.

Publishers cannot say that they deserve to control access because their role in the process is the most important. They facilitate peer review, which is critical, and add value in other, less critical ways. But nobody can argue that facilitating peer review is more important than conducting the research in the first place, or writing it up, or even funding it. The peer-review provider is now the access gatekeeper, but not because any rational principle requires it. When we start to replace this inherited system with a more rational one, the former gatekeepers protest, but I have yet seen them offer a principled objection. I've seen principled or evidence-based objections to the economics of OA journals and to the economic consequences of OA archiving; these are constructive, deserve responses, and are receiving responses. But publishers have not been as constructive or coherent on the fundamental proposition, represented by the NIH plan, that publishers should not be the ones to control when or on what terms the public will have access to publicly-funded research. Their objections to this proposition have been naked assertions of economic self-interest at the expense of the public interest.

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The three paragraphs are by Peter Suber, in the November 2004 SPARC Open Access Newsletter (<http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/newsletter/11-02-04.htm>).

Sincerely,
Tom