

*What is the next step for those boycotting Elsevier's journals? **Neil Stewart** ([http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/blog-contributors/#Neil\\_Stewart](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/blog-contributors/#Neil_Stewart)) writes that one thing academics can do to bring about open access publishing immediately is to take the 'Green' road to open access and enjoy higher citations counts by placing their work in institutional repositories.*



The recently launched campaign (<http://thecostofknowledge.com/>) to boycott publishing, editing and reviewing papers for any of Elsevier's stable of journal titles, instigated by Tim Gowers (<http://gowers.wordpress.com/2012/01/21/elsevier-my-part-in-its-downfall/>), has been gathering steam over the last couple of weeks. The campaign has received a great deal of publicity from some (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2012/feb/02/academics-boycott-publisher-elsevier>) very (<http://www.economist.com/node/21545974>) prominent (<http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/elsevier-publishing-boycott-gathers-steam-among-academics/35216>) sources (<http://www.forbes.com/sites/timworstall/2012/01/28/elseviers-publishing-model-might-be-about-to-go-up-in-smoke/>), and an eloquent explanation of why one academic chose to join the boycott was recently published on this blog (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/02/01/stand-down-journal-referee/>). The issue of access (or the lack thereof) to scholarly research is being debated across the web as never before, with a number of prominent commentators arguing for open access to research.

The boycott is based on what seems to be a general dissatisfaction with Elsevier's journal publishing practices, with three aspects of these practices cited as being particularly objectionable:

1. The prices Elsevier charges for access to its titles, and the resulting profits it makes.
2. Elsevier's so-called "bundling" of subscriptions, whereby libraries are forced to buy titles in large packages, with the packages containing both titles of interest and those to which libraries would not necessarily otherwise subscribe.
3. Elsevier's support for the Research Works Act (<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c112:H.R.3699>:) (RWA), a piece of legislation which seeks to roll back open access to scholarly research by reversing US government funder mandates, such as the mandate to deposit National Institute of Health (<http://www.nih.gov/>)-funded research to PubMed Central (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/>).

The boycott has been criticised for being incoherent (<http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2012/02/02/mysteries-of-the-elsevier-boycott/>), a view which I have a certain amount of sympathy with, given that Elsevier are by no means the only publishers supporting the RWA (<http://publishers.org/press/56/>), and that they certainly aren't the only publishers engaging in charging high and ever-increasing prices for journal subscriptions (the so-called "Serials crisis" ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serials\\_crisis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serials_crisis))), or in bundling subscriptions. It seems to be Elsevier's size, perceived domination of the journals market and resistance to open access that has made them the target of the campaign, perhaps as being representative of commercial journal publishing as a whole.

What can't be denied is the scale of the public relations disaster for Elsevier- whether or not the boycott is itself coherent, the campaign has resulted in nothing but bad publicity for the company, much of it coming from the academic community- the very people who provide Elsevier with content. Richard Poynder has argued (<http://poynder.blogspot.com/2012/01/elsevier-needs-to-get-out-more.html>) that Elsevier's lack of a public face has exacerbated this problem (though there is some evidence they are now making a concerted effort in this regard (<http://poynder.blogspot.com/2012/02/elseviers-alicia-wise-on-rwa-west-wing.html>)) – and even when Elsevier's spokespeople attempt to defend their practices (<http://chronicle.com/article/As-Journal-Boycott-Grows/130600/>), they come across as secretive by being unwilling to divulge their prices, as Steven Poole has pointed out (<https://twitter.com/#%21/stevenpoole/status/165024682028969984>). A recent statement ([http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/intro.cws\\_home/elsevierstatement](http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/intro.cws_home/elsevierstatement)) from the company has provoked more ire by stating that "We oppose in principle the notion that governments should be able to dictate the terms by which products of private sector investments are distributed, especially if they are to be distributed for free", ignoring the fact that both the research used to create articles and the peer

review used to validate them are provided by academics for free. The fact that the campaign has been instigated by academics themselves (as opposed to librarians, who have been banging on about these issues for ages (<http://blogs.library.duke.edu/scholcomm/2012/01/31/why-boycott-elsevier/>), or indeed other interested parties) is in my view positive- anything that makes academics question why they are, for example, voluntarily transferring their copyright to publishers can only be a good thing.

So what are likely to be the long term effects of the boycott? To quote Zhou Enlai's opinion on the effects of the French Revolution, I would argue "It is too soon to say", but a couple of prominent commentators have offered complementary visions of the future of scholarly communications and publishing. In an excellent post, open science advocate Cameron Neylon has argued that, within ten years, traditional models of journal publishing will be gone (<http://cameronneylon.net/blog/the-research-works-act-and-the-breakdown-of-mutual-incomprehension/>), and "Several major publishers will not survive the transition. A few will and a whole set of new players will spring up to fill the spaces". Neylon suggests that so-called "Gold Open Access" ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open\\_access\\_journal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_access_journal)) is the likely model on which the new landscape will be predicated, where authors pay to publish, using funds from either their institution or research funder to do so, for example the huge, growing and increasingly respected PLoS One (<http://www.plosone.org/home.action>) journal. Martin Weller suggests that it should be that venerable institution, the University press ([http://nogoodreason.typepad.co.uk/no\\_good\\_reason/2012/02/why-its-time-for-the-university-press-again.html](http://nogoodreason.typepad.co.uk/no_good_reason/2012/02/why-its-time-for-the-university-press-again.html)), which might be one of the players to step into the journal (or journal-like) publishing breach.

Ten years is a long time, though, so how can cash-strapped academics make their research openly accessible in the meantime, thereby maximising its dissemination and impact? I would argue that the best way is to follow the "Green" road to open access (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-archiving>), by archiving research in your university's Institutional Repository (full disclosure: I manage City University London's repository City Research Online (<http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/>)). Doing so results in your articles being made openly and freely available to anyone who wishes to access them via the Web (and this really does work: over the last 3 months, City Research Online has had papers downloaded by visitors from more than 55 different countries); securely preserves your research for posterity; and (the killer argument) has been shown to increase citations to your articles when compared to research which remains "closed". (<http://eprints.ecs.soton.ac.uk/18516/>) If that's not generating "impact" for your work, I don't know what is.

So, whether or not you feel able to support the Elsevier boycott, and regardless of changes to journal publishing and scholarly communications over the next decade, you can make your work openly accessible now. Get archiving!

Related posts:

1. Restricting online access: what evidence do publishers have to support their claims that open access negatively affects sales? (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/12/05/restricting-online-access-what-evidence/>)
2. By championing open access publishing, the academic community can bring us closer to making research available to all. (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/10/28/championing-open-access/>)
3. Open access repositories are beginning to push academic publishers off their previously unreachable perch. (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/10/10/open-access-repositories/>)
4. Academic journals remain unnecessary and unhealthy whilst open access archives such as arXiv continue to grow. (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/09/21/academic-journals-arxiv-peter-coles/>)
5. New Bill Would Put Taxpayer-Funded Science Behind Pay Walls (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/01/17/publica-science-pay-walls/>)