

Announcing Unpaywall: unlocking #openaccess versions of paywalled research articles as you browse

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Today marks the official launch of Unpaywall, a web browser extension that links users directly to free full-text versions of research articles. **Heather Piwovar** and **Jason Priem** of Impactstory, the team behind Unpaywall, report on the successful pre-release phase, and explain how two decades of investment, a slew of new tools, and a flurry of new government mandates have helped build a powerful momentum behind green open access.



Today we're launching a new tool to help people read research literature, instead of getting stuck behind paywalls. It's an extension for Chrome and Firefox that links you to free full-text as you browse research articles. Hit a paywall? No problem: click the green tab and read it free!

The extension is called [Unpaywall](#), and it's powered by an open index of more than ten million legally-uploaded, open access resources. Reports from our pre-release are great: "Unpaywall found a full-text copy 53% of the time," reports librarian, [Lydia Thorne](#). Fisheries researcher [Lachlan Fetterplace](#) used Unpaywall to find "about 60% of the articles I tested. This one is a great tool and I suspect it will only get better." And indeed it has! We're now getting full-text on 85% of [2016's most-covered research papers](#).



Unpaywall doesn't just help researchers, but also people outside academia who don't enjoy the expensive subscription benefits of institutional libraries. "As someone who runs a non-profit organisation in a developing country this extension is GOLD!" says [Nikita Shiel-Rolle](#). It helps journalists, high school students, practitioners, and, crucially, policymakers, who don't usually have subscription access to the fact-based research literature. There has never been a time when unlocking facts has been so important. So we're thrilled that more than 10,000 people from 143 countries have installed the extension already.

The best part is it's powered by fully legal, free, open access uploads by the authors themselves. More and more funders and universities are requiring authors to upload copies of their papers to institutional and subject repositories. This has created a deep resource of legal open access papers, ripe for building upon.

In fact, a few weeks ago David Prosser, executive director of Research Libraries UK, tweeted:

We love this observation, and not just because two of the three projects he mentioned are from Impactstory. We love it because we agree: Green OA infrastructure is at a tipping point where two decades of investment, a slew of new tools, and a flurry of new government mandates is about to make Green OA the scholarly publishing game-changer.

A lot of folks have suggested that Sci-Hub is scholarly publishing's "Napster moment", where the internet finally disrupts a very resilient, profitable niche market. That's probably true. But like the music industry shut down Napster, Elsevier will likely be able to shut down Sci-Hub. They've got both the money and the legal (if not necessarily the moral) high ground and that's a tough combo to beat.

But the future is what comes *after* Napster. It's in the iTunes and the Spotifys of scholarly communications. We are at this open access inflection point.

This month is a great time to appreciate this; there's amazing OA news everywhere you look:

- PubMed [announced institutional repository LinkOut](#), which links every PubMed article to a free Green copy in institutional repositories, where available. This is huge, since PubMed is one of the world's most important portals to the research literature
- The Helmsley Charitable Trust [awarded ASAPbio \\$1 million](#) to build a next-generation preprint infrastructure for life sciences, followed later by [an NIH announcement](#) that it'll accept citations to preprints
- [The Open Access Button announced](#) a new project to use green OA to meet interlibrary loan requests.

Over the next few years, we're going to see an explosion in the amount of research available openly, as government mandates in the [US](#), [UK](#), [Europe](#), and beyond take force. As that happens, the raw material is there to build completely new ways of searching, sharing, and accessing the research literature.

We think [Unpaywall](#) is a really powerful example: when there's a big "Get It Free" button next to the "Pay Money" button on publisher pages, it starts to look like the game is changing. And it is changing. Unpaywall is just the beginning of the amazing open access future we're going to see. We can't wait!

[Install it](#), [learn more](#), and follow [@unpaywall](#). We'd love your help in spreading the word about Unpaywall to your friends and colleagues. Together we can accelerate forwards to a future of full #openaccess for all!

This article gives the views of the authors, and not the position the organisations they work for, the LSE Impact Blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [comments policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

About the authors

Heather Piwowar is a co-founder of Impactstory and a leading researcher in research data availability and data reuse. She wrote one of the first papers measuring the [citation benefit of publicly available research data](#), has studied [patterns in data archiving](#), [patterns of data reuse](#), and the [impact of journal data sharing policies](#). Heather has a bachelor's and master's degree from MIT in electrical engineering, ten years of experience as a software engineer, and a PhD in Biomedical Informatics from the University of Pittsburgh. She is a [frequent speaker](#) on research data archiving, writes a well-respected [research blog](#), and is active on twitter ([@researchremix](#)).

Jason Priem is a co-founder of Impactstory and a doctoral student in information science (currently on leave of absence) at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Since [coining the term "altmetrics"](#), he's remained active in the field, organising the annual [altmetrics workshops](#), giving [invited talks](#), and publishing [peer-reviewed altmetrics research](#). Jason has contributed to and created several open-source software projects, including [Zotero](#) and [Feedvis](#), and has experience and training in art, design, and information visualisation. Sometimes he writes on a [blog](#) and [tweets](#).

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