End of UVM'S *ScienceDirect* Contract
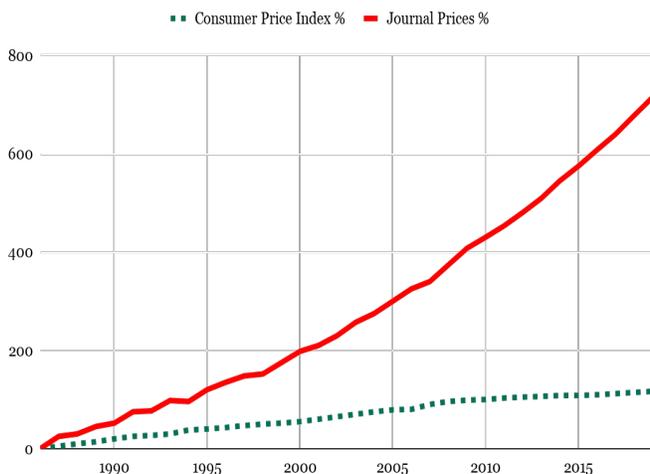
Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is *ScienceDirect*?

A: *ScienceDirect* is a massive collection of academic journals, published and bundled by the Dutch conglomerate Elsevier.

Q: What does *ScienceDirect* cost?

A: Elsevier keeps its pricing policies secret; it does not reveal what it charges other institutions. Elsevier charged UVM $1.8 million in 2020.
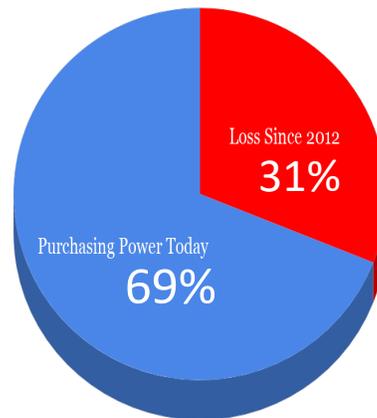
Q: What is the problem?

A: We cannot keep pace with prices for academic journals. Since 1986, the consumer price index has increased by roughly 150%. (See the dotted line in the graph to the left.) During that same period, journal prices have increased roughly 700%. (See the solid line in the graph.) In just the last six years, these increases have reduced the Libraries' purchasing power by 31%. (See the pie chart on following page.)

JOURNAL AND CONSUMER PRICE INDEX INCREASES, 1986-2019

Q: Why did UVM fail to negotiate a new contract for *ScienceDirect*?

A: We negotiated in good faith with Elsevier for a fair and sustainable price. But Elsevier made no meaningful concessions. Without a cut in price, we could not continue to pay for a product whose price has increased every year at a rate far exceeding general inflation.

UVM LIBRARIES' LOSS OF PURCHASING POWER SINCE 2012

Loss Since 2012
31%

Purchasing Power Today
69%

Q: What role did UVM faculty play in this decision?

A: The Faculty Library Advisory Committee and the UVM Research, Scholarship & the Creative Arts Committee approved and forwarded this resolution to the UVM Faculty Senate, which voted to adopt it on November 16, 2020.

Q: Why the focus on *ScienceDirect*?

A: *ScienceDirect* was, by far, the most expensive of our "big-ticket" packages. This single product consumed 25% of our collections budget. Elsevier prohibits libraries with *ScienceDirect* contracts from reducing the amount they spend on Elsevier journals—in fact, it typically requires libraries to commit to price increases every year. Hence, our only way to remain with *ScienceDirect* has been to cancel journals and books published by Elsevier's competitors.

Q: So can't we just cancel journals and books published by Elsevier's competitors?

A: We have already cut 778 journals published by Elsevier's competitors. We've also cut our book budget in half (from 13,758 books per year to 6,666). And we've eliminated 11 positions in the libraries. We're running out of non-Elsevier things to cut.

Q: May I still publish in Elsevier journals?

A: Yes. Cutting our subscription to *ScienceDirect* will have no effect on your ability to publish with whomever you wish.

Q: Have other institutions cancelled *ScienceDirect*?

A: Yes. Most notably, the entire [University of California system](), including Berkeley and UCLA—institutions among the top public universities in the nation—decided they could live without *ScienceDirect*. The entire [State University of New York system]() cancelled its contract in 2020. [Many institutions]() large and small, including at least 12 R1s, have walked away.

Q: Is there a way out of this relentless cycle of cuts?

A: Not unless we reform the current system of scholarly publishing. This system requires us to turn over copyright in our articles to publishers, who then sell it back to us and our institutions for thousands of dollars per journal—despite the fact that we researchers do most of commercial publishers' work for them.

- We obtain the research grants.
- We conduct the research.
- We populate their editorial boards.
- We serve as their reviewers.
- And we edit their journals—usually without compensation.

Commercial publishers, in effect, charge us (through subscription fees) to work for them. And because just a handful of commercial publishers now enjoy something like a monopoly in certain fields, they can and do raise prices with impunity. The result: We can no longer afford to buy back the research we give publishers as a gift. The situation is even worse for those outside the academy: Most of the world enjoys no access to our work—work that publishers lock behind paywalls.

Q: How can I help change the system?

A: In many ways.

- You can [read about]() the crisis in academic publishing.
- You can [sign a pledge]() not to publish with, referee for, or serve on editorial boards for Elsevier journals.

- You can publish your articles with [reputable publishers](#) that do not lock your research behind paywalls.
- You can urge editorial boards in your field to move their journals from commercial entities to new platforms (see [here](#) and [here](#)).
- You can upload preprints of your articles into UVM's [ScholarWorks](#) and into other, freely available, disciplinary repositories.
- You can support an effort to craft a Harvard-like [distribution agreement](#) for research produced by UVM.

Q: How can I obtain Elsevier articles without a *ScienceDirect* subscription?
A: In multiple ways: through open repositories, article-sharing sites, and interlibrary loan. See the appendix below for guidance.

Q: Can I still browse the content of Elsevier journals without ScienceDirect?
A: Yes. Elsevier offers a free browsing service. You can subscribe without charge to table-of-contents updates (with abstracts) for as many Elsevier titles as you wish. [See here](#) for an example.

Q: How will the Libraries use the savings?
A: We will:

- Balance our ledgers—that is, climb out of our structural deficit and remain solvent—while reallocating funds now spent disproportionately on Elsevier journals.
- Create a fund from which we can, if necessary, hire more interlibrary loan staff, thus ensuring we can process an anticipated increase in interlibrary loan requests.
- Purchase articles on the spot when faculty tell us they need a copy immediately.
- Support and launch open access initiatives, providing authors with publishing opportunities that do not lock their work away from most readers.

Q: How can UVM support fairer models of scholarly communication?

A: In several ways:

- Faculty have expressed concerns about the dearth of non-predatory publishing venues. We take these concerns seriously. We must promote new ventures—ventures committed to rigorous peer review and professional editing that do not place barriers between readers and authors or between publishers and authors. Such ventures often take the form of new journals, new academic presses, or new publishing platforms. The UVM Libraries have received numerous proposals from UVM faculty to launch new ventures, and we're eager to support such work.

- We're hearing strong support in some quarters of the UVM faculty for following the lead of Harvard and MIT in passing a campus-wide open-access policy. Such a policy would dramatically aid efforts to place articles authored by UVM faculty in open repositories.

Appendix

How to Obtain Elsevier Articles Without a *ScienceDirect* Subscription

1. **Continue using *ScienceDirect*.** Hundreds of the Elsevier journals purchased before 2020 remain available through *ScienceDirect*.

2. **Search Google Scholar.** Some authors post copies of their articles on the web. Google Scholar usually finds them.

3. **Use plug-ins.** Install the following two buttons in your Chrome or Firefox web browser:
   - Open Access Button: This extension automatically searches for free, legal copies of an article. When it fails, it will contact the article's author on your behalf.
   - Unpaywall: This extension will point you to any freely available versions of an article.

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4. **Search online repositories.** Authors frequently deposit copies of their articles in disciplinary repositories. Google Scholar searches all of the following repositories (and many more): OSF Preprints (multiple preprint services), PubMed Central, arXiv, bioRxiv, RePEc, SSRN, and Humanities CORE.

5. **Request the article from its author.** Many authors are happy to honor requests for their articles directly and via social networking sites like Academia.edu, ResearchGate, Mendeley, and HumanitiesCommons. You can also request copies via Twitter, using the hashtag #icanhazpdf, together with a link to the article.

6. **Use Interlibrary Loan**. The UVM Libraries boast an average turnaround time of 11.6 hours per article. When searching any UVM database (including those that index Elsevier journals), you can click on the "Find it at UVM" button. Our computer system will automatically fill out an interlibrary loan request on your behalf; simply click "Submit" and a PDF of the article will be delivered to your email inbox.

7. **What about SciHub?** SciHub is a pirate site that provides free access to most articles from most Elsevier journals, plus millions of other articles from thousands of other journals. SciHub reports 400,000 article downloads per day. Because SciHub violates U.S. copyright law, the UVM Libraries cannot endorse its use.

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