

To: The A&M Campus Community
From: David H. Carlson, Dean University Libraries
Date: 2/5/21
Re: Ongoing Elsevier Negotiations

Last month I distributed an update to campus on the progress with our negotiations with the for-profit publisher, Elsevier, and our participation in the [Texas Coalition](#). I am committed to a monthly update to keep the campus informed.

Please note: Texas A&M is one member of the Coalition which includes over 40 institutions. While I believe my update to the campus is broadly accurate and reflective of the issues, these comments represent my perspective and personal observations. I do not speak for the Coalition as a whole. In particular, any speculation on my part about future actions is just that: speculation. Future action will be based on decisions and vote of the Coalition Steering Committee, of which I am a member. I am confident that these decisions will benefit Texas A&M and will affirm our strength as a Coalition.

As with my January update, the first issue to consider is our continuing access to Elsevier current content.

- **Ongoing Online Access**

I regret to report that after another month of negotiations, we have not reached agreement on a contract but there is some good news about continuation of access. Under the same conditions as last month -- an informal commitment to continue discussions -- Elsevier has agreed to maintain access for all institutions with contracts that concluded in December, 2020. This is about half the institutions in the Coalition, including Texas A&M. The extension is for the month of February only and will be reconsidered at the end of the month.

- **Negotiations Overview**

From the beginning, a primary objective of the Coalition has been to reach a successful contract. This remains a key goal, but not our only one. We will not accept a contract without progress and attainment of other important goals relative to cost reduction, copyright, ownership of content by campus authors, broader access to research, and improvement for libraries in the stewardship of our content.

As I wrote last month, it is very hard to summarize complex proposals that are the results of many hours of discussion that can change rapidly. However, the primary proposal from Elsevier at this time would create a "Shared Title List" among the Coalition representing titles that make up a large percentage of our access to content. Generally, we think such a proposal is worth consideration. Studies show that the "long tail" of access in loss of content can be addressed very effectively and economically through open access tools, interlibrary loan, commercial document delivery, and direct requests by users. However, the reduction in access of this proposal is just one element of our loss. My January update listed the other areas where we would lose benefits:

- Loss of future access to the content of all titles in the shared list over the course of the new contract.
- Continuation of cost modeling based on decades-old, legacy print subscriptions.
- No changes or improvement in faculty ownership of content.

In January, there was talk on these issues; we are expecting and hoping for progress soon.

- **The Future**

With the February extension, the Coalition has now agreed to two months' extension to maintain access without agreement on a contract. There is a growing sense of urgency to reach agreement on a final contract. I am uncertain if Elsevier or the Coalition will agree to another information extension. If access to current content is lost, we are prepared. The Libraries has had an "Always Access" Task Force in place for several months planning and preparing for this eventuality. The Task Force has developed a [web site of resources and information](#) that I recommend. The Coalition has always been discussing ways in which we can help each other collectively and streamline access to content.

Also, please remember that if we lose access to current content it will be only to Elsevier published current content; we will maintain online access to all content purchased by A&M Libraries prior to January 2021 and this is substantial. You have our unwavering commitment that if you must have access to a current article we will get it for you. We continue to have the strong support of our Coalition partners whose contracts did not expire at the end of 2020. These libraries are firm in their commitment to prioritize our requests for Elsevier content through InterLibrary Loan and other processes.

- **Faculty Support**

I want to take a moment to thank the faculty for their support of our efforts. My January update prompted several of you to write me with emails of support and encouragement. Here are three examples that were representative of the comments I received:

- A faculty member in CEHD: *We're behind you. The out of control expenses need to be reined in.*
- A faculty member in Agriculture: *Thank you VERY MUCH for your detailed and most informative message about negotiations with Elsevier. I hope that you/the coalition members are successful in negotiating an acceptable contract that will allow researchers and teachers full access to resources!*
- A faculty member in Engineering: *Your efforts and transparency are much appreciated. As you well know, faculty do most of the work (for free!), so it is obscene that Elsevier is the only one benefitting (monetarily).*

Your support is critical and greatly appreciated. I continue to welcome your feedback.