

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The editorial staff of *California Agriculture* welcomes your letters, comments and suggestions. Please write to us at [calag@ucop.edu](mailto:calag@ucop.edu) or 1111 Franklin St., 6th floor, Oakland, CA 94607. Include your full name and address. Letters may be edited for space and clarity.

## More voices: Making the case for open access

Should peer-reviewed research developed at tax-supported institutions such as UC be freely available to the public? A recent *California Agriculture* editorial (January-March 2006; "California Agriculture delivers access to peer-reviewed research") explored this issue, noting the impact of soaring journal prices on both libraries and individuals.

Some recent developments:

- In May, U.S. senators introduced legislation requiring agencies with annual research budgets of more than \$100 million (e.g., EPA, USDA) to provide public access to research results no more than 6 months after publication. (The National Institutes of Health already encourages posting within 12 months on PubMed.)
- In July, Rice University announced plans to become the first all-digital university press; browsers will be able to read the digital books for free but will pay to download.
- This summer, the journal *Nature* offered authors the opportunity to make their submissions available online immediately as preprints and receive comments from any reader.
- In August, UC libraries joined Google Book Search, the massive book scanning and digitization project, marking the largest expansion of that project to date (UC potentially offers the contents of 100 libraries on 10 campuses).
- By September, UC's eScholarship Repository, the open-access database of the California Digital Library, had posted 3.7 million full-text downloads since opening in April 2002. (*California Agriculture* posted close to 1,900 full-text downloads between May and September, after initial posting of peer-reviewed articles at the site.)

The letters that follow explore these issues.

— Editor

### Agricultural publications online

The January-March 2006 *California Agriculture* editorial underlined the importance of publishing peer-reviewed agricultural research, the advantages of open-access outlets (including our experiment station and extension service publications) and the advantages of making information available through our institutional repositories.

At my own institution we are currently looking at our languishing experiment station series and discussing what their future should be. As I have looked at other experiment stations, it seems we are not alone in seeing publication in these once-prolific series fall off.

Wouldn't it be a wonderful contribution to the National Digital Library for Agriculture to have access to not only the historical record of agricultural research, but also the current research, readily available to anyone, anytime, anyplace?

Constance J. Britton, Librarian  
Ohio State University, Wooster

*Editor's note: The National Agricultural Library (NAL) is laying the groundwork to provide comprehensive digital access to agricultural information from partnering institutions and universities.*

### Digitizing research, improving access

The January-March 2006 editorial addressed a key issue. This is the fact that researchers and members of the public often need access to the results of peer-reviewed research, but it is no longer easily accessible or affordable.

Many agricultural librarians have been confronting this for quite a while. Questions come up routinely, such as a graduate student trying to access information on Pierce's disease findings, or a scientist looking for archival data on soil characteristics. At the extension level, someone may want to know how close to plant a fruit tree to a fence built of pressure-treated lumber, for fear of contamination from toxic chromated copper arsenate. At a recent brainstorming session sponsored by USAIN (United States Agricultural Information Network) and NAL, concerns raised included the need for digital archiving and repositories, the unrestricted availability of publications to a wide audience, and an easy-to-use search interface like Amazon or Google. The development of a digital repository by the USDA modeled on PubMed, as well as an expansion of open-access journals like PLoS (Public Library of Science), are all efforts that need to be supported and encouraged.

Finding "grey" or "ephemeral literature" has



Like others systemwide, UC Irvine students rely on UC library purchases of essential journals and online subscriptions.

always been problematic in many disciplines. Such items are not commercially published, widely distributed or indexed, and not always archived. Many state agricultural documents, especially at the extension level, fall into this category, and there are now plans to digitize such materials. Libraries and land-grant institutions need to explore further collaboration on publishing and disseminating both extension and the more scholarly experiment station research, given the large amount of material that is no longer widely distributed outside of the local area.

Norma Kobzina, Head, Information Services,  
Biosciences and Natural Resources Library, UC Berkeley

### UC faculty and the right to copyright

I share the conviction that research and scholarship should be broadly accessible and free to the public. The economic dysfunctions cited in the editorial (soaring prices of electronic and print journals, due in part to publisher consolidations) were brought into sharp relief for many UC faculty and administrators during the University's 2003 negotiations with for-profit journal publisher Elsevier, and led to the establishment of the UC Special Committee on Scholarly Communication (SCSC). But while the dysfunctions helped to get our attention, it is the opportunities offered by Internet publishing that have led the faculty at UC and other research institutions to become deeply engaged in these issues and propose solutions.

The Internet reduces to near zero the cost of an additional reader when the content is online instead of in print form. Internet publication can also be used to certify, validate, and ensure accuracy and quality of research results. Online peer-review sys-

tems, new measures of impact that include the readership as well as citations of an article, and increased access to original and supplementary data are just a few of the new tools available for ensuring scholarly quality and increasing the usefulness of research.

The SCSC developed a series of white papers for consideration by the UC Academic Council and Assembly, which endorsed them in May 2006. Among other things, these papers recommend that: (1) promotion and tenure processes include appropriate alternative forms of dissemination; (2) researchers manage their copyright to provide greatest access and impact; (3) scholarly societies limit copyright transfer from author to society; and (4) journal publishers accept the right to first publication and routinely permit posting of papers on open-access databases, in some form.

In May, UC's Academic Assembly endorsed a proposal that faculty give UC permission to post their journal articles or conference papers in an open-access repository; final adoption is expected by spring 2007. The SCSC has also proposed open-access archiving of stem-cell research results funded by California's Proposition 71. I am pleased that health sciences have encouraged such policies.

The SCSC does not promote a particular publishing business model or distribution of responsibilities among stakeholders. This is a time for investments that encourage experimentation, such as UC's eScholarship Repository, and for faculty to look outside of their own disciplines to success in other domains.

Lawrence Pitts, Professor of Neurosurgery,  
UC San Francisco  
Chair, Special Committee on Scholarly Communication

### Links to explore

Academic Senate Special  
Committee on Scholarly  
Communication

[www.universityofcalifornia.edu/senate/committees/scsc/reports.html](http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/senate/committees/scsc/reports.html)

Google Book Search

<http://books.google.com>

National Agricultural Library

<http://naldr.nal.usda.gov>

Oxford Journals and  
NAR Open Access Initiative

[www.oxfordjournals.org/our\\_journals/nar/announce\\_openaccess.html](http://www.oxfordjournals.org/our_journals/nar/announce_openaccess.html)

PLoS (Public Library of Science)  
and Creative Commons  
Attribution License

[www.plos.org/about/index.html](http://www.plos.org/about/index.html)

PubMed (biomedical literature)

[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/Literature](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/Literature)

SPARC (Scholarly Publishing and  
Academic Resources Coalition)

[www.arl.org/sparc](http://www.arl.org/sparc)



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