Memo

To: Faculties of: Duke University,  
    North Carolina State University,  
    The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

From: Peter Lange, Provost, Duke University  
      James Oblinger, Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor, NCSU  
      Robert Shelton, Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost, UNC-Chapel Hill

Date: January 14, 2004

Re: Changes in Elsevier Science Access

As many of you know, the member universities of the Triangle Research Libraries Network (TRLN) have decided to discontinue the consortial arrangement by which they provided access to electronic journals published under the Elsevier Science imprint. This move follows months of unsuccessful negotiations by the TRLN libraries with Reed-Elsevier. We recognize that reduced availability of the many prominent science and technology journals published by Elsevier will impose an inconvenience on faculty members and students accustomed to the current arrangement. We believe, however, that the negotiating position adopted by Reed-Elsevier leaves no other option. This memo explains our decision and reaffirms our support of it.

Background
Since 2000, our universities, acting through TRLN, have purchased electronic access to a bundled journal package from Elsevier Science. This package included electronic versions of all the subscriptions held by each university, or approximately 1,300 journals. As a benefit of consortial purchasing, all 1,300 electronic titles have been available to affiliates of every TRLN library, whether or not a given library purchased the print subscription. The contract providing this access expired on December 31, 2003.
Throughout months of renewal negotiations with Elsevier, TRLN and its member libraries have articulated two principal objectives:

1. To regain and maintain control over library collecting decisions in order to meet the constantly evolving information needs of faculty, researchers, and students; and

2. To manage overall costs in order to keep Elsevier expenditures consistent with materials budgets that have not been increasing at anywhere near Elsevier's annual inflation rate.

Elsevier's final offer fails to meet both of these objectives.

In the first place, Elsevier has insisted that each library commit to a policy of zero cancellations over the life of the license. This would not only lock the consortium into an inflexible collection policy, but would inordinately privilege the journals of a single publisher. In order to maintain Elsevier subscriptions, journals from other publishers and in other disciplines would have to be canceled. The result would be a growing imbalance in library collections. We are additionally concerned about the detrimental effect such a commitment would have on the scholarly associations and society publishers whose journals would become especially vulnerable to cancellation.

The effects of this provision would only be magnified by Elsevier's additional insistence on significant annual cost increases above TRLN's current contract terms. The consortium currently spends in excess of $4.5 million annually with the company. The revised inflationary rates, coupled with no-cancellation policies, are economically unsustainable for TRLN's member libraries.

**Outcome**

Because Elsevier Science has not offered TRLN a pricing model responsive to the needs of the consortium, TRLN has elected to terminate its consortial arrangement with Reed Elsevier. Each TRLN library will now make individual arrangements for Elsevier journal access on its own campus. One consequence of this move will be the loss of electronic access to the body of titles shared throughout TRLN, resulting in a reduction in access to 400-500 journals per campus. In addition, each library will also need to cancel locally held subscriptions in order to offset the substantial price increases that Elsevier imposes on single institutions for electronic access.

**National Context**

The breakdown of negotiation with Elsevier is only the most extreme symptom of a much larger problem. Academic libraries across the country have faced escalating costs to sustain the scholarly communication system for years. The Association of Research Libraries reports that, over the past fifteen years, serial costs for member libraries have increased 215% while the Consumer Price Index has increased by only 62%. Although libraries and universities are supporting new publishing models in an effort to maintain access to high-quality, peer-reviewed research at a manageable cost, there is still a reliance on the products of for-profit publishers. As a result of this dynamic, libraries can no longer offer the same range of publications to the academic community.

It is our understanding that Cornell and Harvard have also rejected the multi-year, no-cancellation model for access to Reed Elsevier journals and are making arrangements similar to TRLN for access to a more limited collection of titles. We also understand that the University of California continues to negotiate over the same provisions and has yet to sign a multi-year license with the terms imposed by Elsevier.
Our commitment
We firmly believe that universities must respond to this economic crisis of the state of scholarly communication. Libraries must be empowered, through dialogue with the university community, to obtain appropriate research material without sacrificing content and budgetary decisions to the publisher. Future library negotiations should follow the principles adhered to in this particular process, that libraries must make collection decisions and manage costs.

In the immediate term, our libraries will work with you to minimize the impact of this particular decision on your research and teaching. The libraries will cooperate through the TRLN consortium and with other research libraries to deliver copies of articles in canceled journals to you in a timely way and to cover any reasonable costs, including royalties, for access to those articles. At the same time, they will begin to explore with you new models of scholarly communication that may, in the long term, help reduce costs and make scholarly information more widely available.