

Public Library of Science

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The following letter was sent to signers of the PLoS Open Letter on August 31, 2001.

Open Letter

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Dear Colleague,

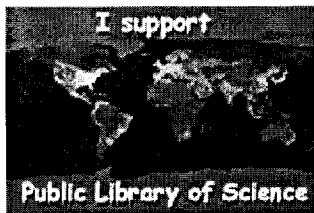
We are writing to update you on the status of the Public Library of Science initiative, and to offer our perspective on what it has accomplished and what we can do now to continue to work toward free and unrestricted access to the published record of scientific research. More importantly, we ask for your participation and support in a major new effort - the launching of new scientific journals that will publish peer-reviewed scientific research reports online with no restrictions on access or distribution.

We are very grateful for the courageous step you took in signing the Public Library of Science open letter. In the 10 months since this letter began circulating, more than 26,000 of our colleagues from 170 countries have signed it, expressing their strong commitment to free and unrestricted access to the published record of scientific research. Your strong voice has brought the issues of access to and ownership of the scientific literature to the attention of scientists and the public, and has catalyzed serious thought, discussion, and debate. The response from the international scientific community and the public has been overwhelmingly positive. It is clear, however, that scientists' response to this initiative has been more enthusiastic than the publishing establishment's. Our initiative has prompted significant and welcome steps by many scientific publishers towards freer access to published research, but in general these steps have fallen short of the reasonable policies we proposed.

We have all pledged that, beginning in September 2001, we will exclusively support journals that have agreed to provide their archival contents, within 6 months of publication, to online public libraries of science. We had hoped that many of the journals that we have long supported and admired would respond constructively. Indeed, several leading journals have done so - agreeing to make their published research reports freely available at the NIH's public archive, PubMed Central, within six months of publication. These include the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Molecular Biology of the Cell, the British Medical Journal, Bioinformatics, Genome Biology, the Canadian Medical Association Journal, the Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association (JAMIA), and diverse new online journals published by BioMedCentral (a complete, updated list of such journals will be posted at <http://www.publiclibraryofscience.org>).

With September upon us, we must all now decide how to proceed. We believe the best way to advance our shared goals is to make every effort to publish our work in, and give our full support to, journals that have adopted the policy proposed in the open letter. By directing our manuscripts and our voluntary assistance (reviewing and editing) to these journals, we will reaffirm our belief that no single entity, whether a publisher or government, should have monopoly control over any portion of the scientific literature; and we will keep our promise of support to the journals whose actions endorse this principle. In doing so, we can support not only the journals who have earned our loyalty, but also the 26,000 colleagues who share our commitment.

We recognize that the range of journals that have met our conditions is not yet sufficient to accommodate all the work that we and our colleagues must publish. Despite our best intentions, it may not always be feasible to publish our work in a journal whose publication practices meet our highest standards. In such cases, we suggest that we make every effort to publish in the available option that comes closest to meeting our goal of unrestricted free distribution within 6 months. Several journals, including *Nucleic Acids Research*, *Genetics*, *American Journal of Human Genetics*, the research journals published by the American Society for Microbiology, several journals published by the Cold Spring Harbor Press, *EMBO Journal* and others have taken a significant, partial step by allowing full-text searching at PubMedCentral, but still requiring that the articles be accessible only at their own sites. And a growing number of journals now allow free access to back issues, after various intervals, but only at the publisher's website and without full-text searching at a public site (see, for example, <http://www.highwire.org/lists/freeart.dtl>). The journals that have taken these positive steps are clearly more deserving of our support than those that have made no



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constructive efforts at all.

It is important for us to continue talking with the publishers of journals that are important to us, but which have not yet adopted the policies we support. This would be an ideal time to write or speak to the editors of two or three of your favorite journals, and we urge you to do so. Let them know where you stand, and that your continuing support is dependent upon their response to this initiative.

If we follow this course and demonstrate our commitment to free and unrestricted access to scientific literature, more journals are likely to adopt the policies we advocate. However, the resistance this initiative has met from most of the scientific publishers has made it clear that if we really want to change the publication of scientific research, we must do the publishing ourselves. It is now time for us to work together to create the journals we have called for. We believe that it is now both necessary and financially feasible for scientists to create a mechanism for publishing their work - with responsible, efficient peer review and the highest editorial standards - while allowing free and unrestricted online distribution from the moment of publication. We intend to establish a non-profit scientific publisher under the banner of the Public Library of Science, operated by scientists, for the benefit of science and the public. We are beginning to assemble an editorial board of outstanding scientists from around the world who share this vision. We are already raising the necessary funds to cover the startup and initial operating costs. With your participation, vision and energy we can establish a new model for scientific publishing. Please join us in this effort. A complete description of our plans for PLoS journals, and information on how you can participate in making them a reality, is available at our website: <http://www.publiclibraryofscience.org>.

Signed:

Michael Ashburner, University of Cambridge
Patrick O. Brown, Stanford University
Michael B. Eisen, Lawrence Berkeley National Lab and UC Berkeley
Marc Kirschner, Harvard University
Chaitan Khosla, Stanford University
Roel Nusse, Stanford University
Richard J. Roberts, New England Biolabs
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