



ITHAKA S+R

What's the Big Deal?

How Researchers Are Navigating Changes to Journal Access

Danielle Cooper
Oya Y. Rieger
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Access to higher ed

Working in collaboration with several national initiatives, we are expanding educational opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds.



Student success

We identify, analyze, and assist in the evaluation and execution of innovative strategies and services for improving student learning, graduation rates, and time to degree.



Diversity

Through our research and insight, academic and cultural organizations are able to improve on measures of equity, diversity, and inclusion, both for themselves and in engaging their target populations.



Leadership and governance

We provide guidance on organizational structure and strategic collaborations for leaders across the communities we serve. Through convenings and workshops, we bring key experts together to solve the fundamental challenges facing our sector.



Research and teaching practices

In a rapidly evolving environment, we track how research and teaching practices are changing to help our community develop strategies, services, and products to meet the emerging needs of faculty and students.



Collections and preservation

Our research and advisory projects help secure access to and preservation of the scholarly record, reexamine the nature of collections within the research library, and evaluate the efficacy of preservation initiatives.

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Big Deal Cancellations

- Since the late 1990s, large publishers have marketed bundles of journals at a discounted subscription price.
- Big Deal spending has come to occupy a greater and greater share of materials budgets.
- Some libraries are exploring how to unbundle their Big Deals and/or shift to new arrangements with publishers that prioritize open access.

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The screenshot shows the ITHAKA SR website interface. At the top left is the ITHAKA SR logo. A navigation menu includes 'Our work', 'Publications', 'Blog', 'People', 'About', and 'Contact us'. A search bar is located at the top right. The main content area features a research report titled 'What's the Big Deal? How Researchers Are Navigating Changes to Journal Access' dated June 22, 2021, by Danielle Cooper and Oya Y. Rieger. The report includes a 'Download PDF' button, a 'Cite this Item' button, and social media sharing icons. Below the title, there are sections for 'Topics' (Collections and preservation, Discovery and access, Libraries, Research practices, Scholarly communication) and 'Tags' (Big Deal, Journal cancellation, Licensing, Open access). A 'Table of Contents' link is also present. The 'Executive Summary' section begins with the text: 'The dominant mode by which research libraries have provided maximum journal access as cheaply as possible—subscription bundles or "Big Deals"—is giving way to new approaches. This transition is taking place through a combination of negotiations, activism, business modeling, user needs research, and decision support, among other factors. To support these processes, Ithaka S+R partnered with 11 academic libraries to understand researcher perceptions to help inform their ongoing strategic decision making about Big Deal journal subscriptions.' It continues: 'Recognizing that libraries must also undertake case-by-case assessments prior to making decisions about any particular journal package, in this report we share findings from the project that merit wider public consideration. We detail patterns in how researchers approach discovery and access to journal content, focusing on their experiences when mechanisms for access change. These experiences are used as a jumping off point to also explore researchers' perceptions of the various models for facilitating their access to journal content and of the stakeholders engaged in that work.'

Two authors are featured with their photos and titles:

- Danielle Cooper**, Manager, Collaborations and Research
- Oya Y. Rieger**, Senior Strategist

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Agenda

Study Overview

Key Findings and Strategic Considerations

Discussion & Questions

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Research Questions



<https://www.insidehighered.com/>

- How do Big Deal cancellations affect the research experiences of users and their perceptions of the library?
- How do libraries project, assess, and monitor the potential impact of cancellations?
- What are users' strategies when their access to content changes?

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Canceling the Big Deal Project Partners

Florida State University
 Freie Universität Berlin
 Ohio University
 Oklahoma University
 Pennsylvania State University

University at Buffalo (SUNY)
 University of Denver
 University of Kansas
 University of Pittsburgh
 University of Wyoming
 Wesleyan University

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Project Steps

| Pre-Cancellation | | ITHAKA S+R | |
|--|---|------------|--|
| Decision-Making Factors | | | |
| Project | Decision | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the project a high priority for the institution? Is the project a high priority for the discipline? Is the project a high priority for the field? Is the project a high priority for the community? Is the project a high priority for the profession? Is the project a high priority for the discipline? Is the project a high priority for the field? Is the project a high priority for the community? Is the project a high priority for the profession? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the project a high priority for the institution? Is the project a high priority for the discipline? Is the project a high priority for the field? Is the project a high priority for the community? Is the project a high priority for the profession? Is the project a high priority for the discipline? Is the project a high priority for the field? Is the project a high priority for the community? Is the project a high priority for the profession? | | |
| Library Budget | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the library budget sufficient to support the project? Is the library budget sufficient to support the discipline? Is the library budget sufficient to support the field? Is the library budget sufficient to support the community? Is the library budget sufficient to support the profession? Is the library budget sufficient to support the discipline? Is the library budget sufficient to support the field? Is the library budget sufficient to support the community? Is the library budget sufficient to support the profession? | | | |
| Collection Goals | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the collection align with the institution's goals? Does the collection align with the discipline's goals? Does the collection align with the field's goals? Does the collection align with the community's goals? Does the collection align with the profession's goals? Does the collection align with the discipline's goals? Does the collection align with the field's goals? Does the collection align with the community's goals? Does the collection align with the profession's goals? | | | |
| Collection Size | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the collection size appropriate for the institution? Is the collection size appropriate for the discipline? Is the collection size appropriate for the field? Is the collection size appropriate for the community? Is the collection size appropriate for the profession? Is the collection size appropriate for the discipline? Is the collection size appropriate for the field? Is the collection size appropriate for the community? Is the collection size appropriate for the profession? | | | |
| Collection Quality | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the collection quality high? Is the collection quality medium? Is the collection quality low? Is the collection quality very low? Is the collection quality very high? Is the collection quality medium-high? Is the collection quality medium-low? Is the collection quality low-medium? Is the collection quality high-medium? | | | |
| Collection Access | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the collection accessible to the institution? Is the collection accessible to the discipline? Is the collection accessible to the field? Is the collection accessible to the community? Is the collection accessible to the profession? Is the collection accessible to the discipline? Is the collection accessible to the field? Is the collection accessible to the community? Is the collection accessible to the profession? | | | |
| Collection Use | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the collection used by the institution? Is the collection used by the discipline? Is the collection used by the field? Is the collection used by the community? Is the collection used by the profession? Is the collection used by the discipline? Is the collection used by the field? Is the collection used by the community? Is the collection used by the profession? | | | |
| Collection Maintenance | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the collection well-maintained? Is the collection poorly maintained? Is the collection not maintained? Is the collection over-maintained? Is the collection under-maintained? Is the collection well-maintained? Is the collection poorly maintained? Is the collection not maintained? Is the collection over-maintained? Is the collection under-maintained? | | | |
| Collection Funding | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the collection funded by the institution? Is the collection funded by the discipline? Is the collection funded by the field? Is the collection funded by the community? Is the collection funded by the profession? Is the collection funded by the discipline? Is the collection funded by the field? Is the collection funded by the community? Is the collection funded by the profession? | | | |
| Collection Location | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the collection located in the institution? Is the collection located in the discipline? Is the collection located in the field? Is the collection located in the community? Is the collection located in the profession? Is the collection located in the discipline? Is the collection located in the field? Is the collection located in the community? Is the collection located in the profession? | | | |

- Conduct a collection assessment exercise to identify 2-3 priority disciplines or groups of scholars that have been or are likely to be most impacted by cancellation to focus interview recruitment.
- Conduct interviews, transcript and share them with Ithaka S+R for qualitative analysis using NVivo.
- Discuss the Ithaka S+R's initial analysis among the cohort participants.
- Publish a public report to share the key findings and recommendations.

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Key Findings: Discovery and Access

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Discovery and Access Library's Diminishing Role

- Discovery mechanisms are largely decoupled from access mechanisms and the library has a diminished role in discovery space.
- The library catalog is hardly mentioned except for looking for a known monograph/article or complaining about link resolvers.
- Access approaches are largely consistent between scholars across the pre- and post-cancellation schools.
- Experiences were relatively consistent across disciplines.

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Discovery and Access User Search Behavior

- Google Scholar is the most common discovery strategy, whether looking for a known item, trying to stay current by following new works, or conducting literature reviews.
- Other platforms often mentioned include Web of Science, PubMed, Biodiversity Heritage Library, and SciFinder.
- Other methods include backward and forward citation chaining, TOC alerts, and personal and digital social and academic networks.

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[Our institution doesn't] have as good coverage when I started here 20 years ago. And so occasionally I would email friends, colleagues, saying could you send me this PDF? Ironically some of those same friends or colleagues are in California now.

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Key Findings: Hitting the Paywall

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Hitting the Paywall Workarounds

- Decisions to pursue the full-text version of a paywalled article is based on several variables including time horizon relative to deadline, availability of substitutes, and sufficiency of abstract.
- Scholars have positive perceptions of ILL overall. But, many considered ILL to be a “port of last call” as it is (still) not fast enough.
- Many of them are familiar with SciHub but usage is relatively low overall, with some geographic variation observed.

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I have not really experienced any serious negative impact, I don't think I've been able to get everything that I need to get, I occasionally do come up on something that probably I would have just gotten the article immediately, but now I've had to do interlibrary loan or just go to Sci Hub instead.

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Hitting the Paywall

Role of Preprints

- Across the cohort, opinions on preprints were largely tepid as they expressed concerns over lack of sufficient quality control.
- Overall, scholars reported that they prefer not to use preprints for teaching purposes.

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Hitting the Paywall

Impact of Cancellations

- Since the cancellation, interviewees had not yet experienced impact to their research other than inconvenience and inefficiency (which already existed).
- They also share a widespread perspective of minimum to no impact on their department's reputation or their perception of their libraries.

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Key Findings:
Power of
Communication

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Power of Communication

What's Working?

- Communications and consultation are essential to managing stakeholder expectations effectively; the already-established approaches by libraries are generally well regarded
- There is a desire for ongoing communication to get updates, beyond the point of cancellation (impact, new developments, etc.).

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I think it's really problematic for individual universities or even the UC system, which is really large, to pick fights with individual publishing houses. But on the other hand, this for-profit publishing model also has its issues....

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Key Findings: New Publishing Models

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New Publishing Models Perspectives on Open Access

- Institutional/library APC funding programs don't seem to work well from the researchers' perspective
- IRs seldom mentioned, often critically and indicating confusion about their goals.
- There is a desire to work closely with the society publishers

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New Publishing Models

Questions about Business Models

- Scholars praise the OA paradigm but question the business models behind it and potential risks for maintaining quality.
- They are concerned about equity issues associated with new models.
- There is appreciation for OA's potential to broaden readership but priority is finding the right publishing venue for the right audience.

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Strategic Considerations

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Our proposed strategies should not be seen as recommendations for action but rather viewed as data points to inform institutional strategy. When considering a cancellation, it is also important for the library to conduct its own targeted assessment of the potential effects.

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Strategic Consideration

Assessing Impact

- Preprint use cannot (yet) be factored into the equation for determining whether to cancel.
- Develop a more effective mechanism for factoring leakage and/or degrees of access “friction” into collective decision making
- Track cancellation effects holistically over time.

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Strategic Considerations

Communications and Consultations

- Have a robust communications and consultation plan to manage stakeholder expectations effectively.
- Adjust communication and consultation processes depending on the desired end goal of the cancellation.
- Default to transparency and use cancellation and consultation processes to build support for library strategy and broader awareness.

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Strategic Considerations

Responsibility and Value

- Clarify the library's role in addressing equity gaps in scholarly communications.
- Continue to create new and stronger value propositions for researchers.
- Provide robust guidance on appropriate channels for pursuing access beyond institutional subscriptions.

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What's Next?

Highlights from Ithaka S+R's Current Research Agenda

- This fall we are launching a new cohort-based project about making **streaming media** sustainable for academic libraries.
- We are piloting **data services assessment tool** to help universities evaluate and design effective data supports for researchers.
- We are closely tracking the issue **version of record and trust** in scholarly communication, including preprint uptake.

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ITHAKA S+R

Thank you & Please be in touch!

Oya.Rieger@ithaka.org
Danielle.Cooper@ithaka.org

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