

The Global Boycott of Elsevier

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In January this year, Timothy Gowers, a mathematics professor at Cambridge University, expressed criticism of the business practices used by one of the world's leading academic journals, Elsevier. His criticisms were presented in an essay format and posted on his personal blog under the heading "Elsevier - my part in its downfall". The posting resulted in calls to boycott the 'journal giant' and the establishment of a formal boycott website, to which 5,800 academics and scholars have already put their name.

The Dean of the TKU Memorial Library, Prof. Hong-Chu Huang, explained that annually, TKU spends over NT \$60 million on academic journals, one-third of which goes to purchasing Elsevier. Moreover, each year a total of 33 departments request subscription to Elsevier. In the last few years, she added, interest groups in the library industry have undertaken boycott or arbitration actions to rectify what is deemed as "unfair" business practices used by Elsevier, such as "bundling" journal products so that libraries must purchase costly 'bundles' consisting of various journals, many of which they do not in fact require. At present, the task of negotiating cheaper prices has fallen to the Taiwan Academic E-book Consortium. Yet subscription fees have nevertheless continued rising at an average rate of 5% per year. "If this trend continues, with limits in sources of funding and constantly growing subscription rates, the diversity of journals we are able to purchase will be severely constricted. And this could result in a shortage in the provision of academic knowledge." Dr. Chu called on "TKU professors to lend their voice to the global Elsevier boycott by signing the online petition for lower subscription rates."

However, the Dean of the TKU College of Science, Dr. Wang Bo-cheng, expressed that "the fields covered in the Elsevier journals are broad and

the content is detailed. It would be more feasible to reach a reasonable price agreement through negotiations between Elsevier and major national academic institutes such as Academia Sinica or the National Science Council.”