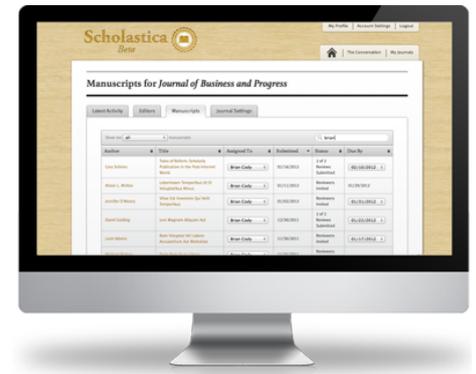# A Group of UChicago Graduate Students Out to Disrupt Academic Publishing

Brian Cody, Cory Schires and Rob Walsh are behind Scholastica, an electronic end-to-end publishing solution for scholarly journals.
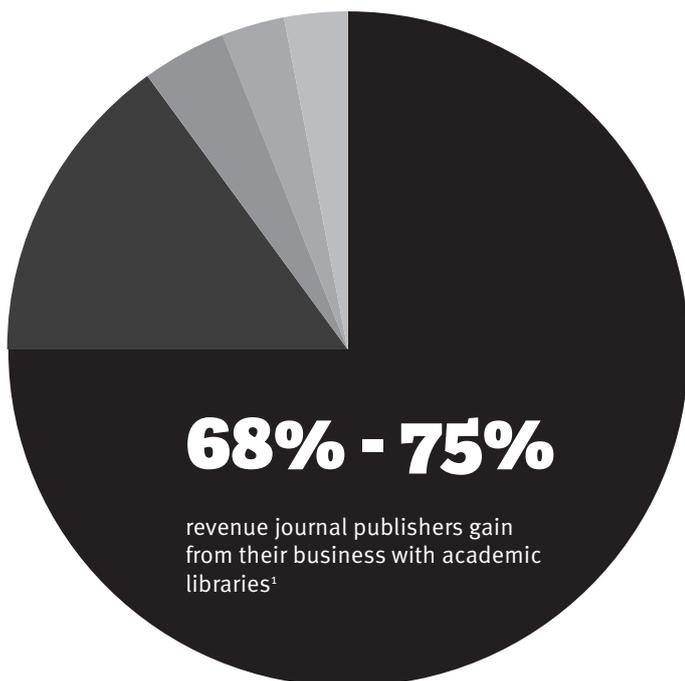
Uncovering a hidden problem

Scholars the world over are incredibly upset at the current state of academic publishing. A few corporate publishers earn huge profits by charging exorbitant subscription fees to university libraries. The people doing the work – professors, graduate students, and independent scholars – rarely see any of that money. **It is absurd to scholars that over the last 30 years publishers have increased subscription fees over 400%, often charging several thousand dollars for a single journal**. The outrage in the academic community has reached major media outlets like the New York Times and The Economist, while Fields Medal winner Timothy Gowers has rallied the academic community to boycott the academic publisher Elsevier.

One night more than a year ago, three friends who met at the University of Chicago discussed the numerous problems they'd seen within the academic publishing industry. Over the next three months, **Brian Cody (PhD student, Sociology), Rob Walsh (MA '07), and Cory Schires (MA '07)** interviewed countless professors, journal editors, and graduate students to discuss the pains they've experienced within the current system of academic publishing. Stories of high prices, difficulties finding qualified reviewers, and the nearly insurmountable task of creating a new journal abounded. **They decided that this is a problem that could be solved with good software**.

Enter Scholastica

Scholastica (www.scholasticahq.com) puts the tools of scholarly publishing back in the hands of scholars themselves. **Scholastica allows journals to cut out the corporate publisher middlemen and publish journals entirely on their own** – and divert the billions in profit back to the people who actually do the work. The old model of publishers physically typesetting and printing hard copies of journals is no longer relevant since scholars have moved towards primarily online research, yet publishers have not adapted to the new digital world. **Scholastica is a fully-featured software suite with a modern, intuitive user interface for managing scholarly articles, and a simple process for finding and managing expert peer reviewers to evaluate the paper's merit for publication.** Scholastica is useful for existing journals, new journals, and open access journals. Scholastica allows journals to sell their content directly to university libraries and independent scholars without the need of a corporate publisher middleman. By providing added value at all steps of the scholarly publishing process, Scholastica removes archaic publishers from the picture and empowers scholarly journals to manage and publish their journals better.

Academic publishing by the numbers

68% - 75%

revenue journal publishers gain from their business with academic libraries[1]

↑ 400%

the increase in journal prices between 1986 and 2008[2]

$ 36%

the operating margin for the academic journal publisher Elsevier[3]

$992

the average price of a US journal subscription for academic institutions[4]

The future of scholarly publishing

Scholarly journals are going to move away from the large corporate publishers such as Elsevier, Thomas Reuters, and Wiley-Blackwell. Instead, **journals will take control of how their content is distributed**, with an emphasis on digital access as physical versions play a less and less important role in modern scholarly research. **Academic libraries** now routinely spend 60%-70% of their materials budget on journals[6] and **have been cutting their subscriptions to journals as prices go up** – but giving control over publishing back to scholars will reduce prices so libraries and scholars can afford access to more and more scholarship. Tools like Scholastica will also allow for new ways of managing peer review, publishing content, and new experiments in how scholarship should be produced and measured.

"

...one can say now, with confidence, is that there is a web tool out there that makes the mechanics of starting up a new (but secretly not so new) journal almost trivial.[5]

- Prof. Timothy Gowers, University of Cambridge
Fields Medal-winning mathematician and organizer of the Elsevier-focused "Cost of Knowledge" boycott writing about Scholastica

Sources

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