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ASCB Position on Public Access to Scientific Literature

The American Society for Cell Biology is a nonprofit scientific society of over 11,000 members at leading research institutions, state colleges, undergraduate teaching institutions, and biotechnology companies. The major activities of the Society include organization of influential scientific meetings in cell biology, advocacy for sound science policy, and programs that support the careers of women and underrepresented minorities in basic biomedical research. The ASCB is also a publisher. The Society's publications include the high-impact monthly research journal, *Molecular Biology of the Cell*.

The ASCB believes strongly that barriers to scientific communication slow scientific progress. The more widely scientific results are disseminated, the more readily they can be understood, applied, and built upon. The sooner findings are shared, the faster they will lead to new scientific insights and breakthroughs. This conviction has motivated the ASCB to provide free access to all of the research articles in *Molecular Biology of the Cell* two months after publication, which it has done since 2001. The articles are available both on the journal's website and in the National Library of Medicine's online archive, PubMed Central.

The vast majority of the biomedical research conducted at American universities and colleges is funded by taxpayers. The ASCB believes that taxpayers are best served when all scientists, educators, physicians, and members of the public – including patients and their families – have access to publicly funded research results. So long as significant access barriers remain, taxpayers are not fully benefiting from the work that they fund. With the proliferation of networked technology, we have an unprecedented and cost-effective means to overcome such barriers. For the first time, it is possible and practical to offer free access to every potential user. It is incumbent upon us, as scientists and citizens, to take full advantage of this opportunity.

Some publishers argue that providing free access to their journal's content will catastrophically erode their revenue base. The experience of many successful research journals demonstrates otherwise; these journals make their online content freely available after a short embargo period that protects subscription revenue. For example, as noted above, the content of *Molecular Biology of the Cell* is free to all after only two months, yet the journal remains not only financially sound, but profitable. The data clearly show that free access and profitability are not mutually exclusive.

Our goal should be to make research articles freely available *as soon as feasible* so that science and the public benefit from their expanded use and application. At the same time, it is important that nonprofit societies and other publishers generate sufficient revenues to sustain the costs of reviewing and publishing articles. We believe that a six-month embargo period represents a reasonable compromise between the financial requirements of supporting a journal and the need for access to current research.

For these reasons, the ASCB supports efforts to require that the results of federally funded biomedical research be made freely available to the public, no more than six months after they are published.