Most students do not realize the surprising amount libraries spend on access to research, and the declining value we have gotten for our money over the past decade.

Even small, liberal arts colleges often spend in excess of $1,000,000 per year on access to scholarly journals. For example, the average journal budget among the Oberlin Group of schools, whose members include Amherst, Bucknell, Davidson, Middlebury, Reed, Rhodes, Trinity, and 73 others, is $1,302,498. That means, on average, a student at one of the Oberlin Group schools will pay $590 per year or $2,360 over the course of a four year college career.

If you go to a large research institution, that number is likely much higher – the average journal budget for the 123 research libraries that compose the Association of Research Libraries is $7,379,928 [1], with many spending far in excess of $10,000,000 per year.

While these expenditures are necessary to provide students with information crucial to their education, their growth over the past decade as a proportion of library spending and as a component of the overall cost of education has resulted in less rather than greater access. This decline in access has occurred, because library budgets cannot keep pace with skyrocketing journal prices. Though we are paying more than ever, we receive access to less and less material. As journal prices continue to rise rapidly and library budgets shrink or, at best in this weak economy, stay the same, the inevitable result will be a lack of access for students.

Given our right to the research we have paid for, the negative effect on students’ education caused by this decline in access is inexcusable.
Read more about universities and declining access
