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You Deserve Access to Research

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FRPAA: it stands for Federal Research Public Access Act (pronounced *fir-pa*). Like many initialisms, it does not roll off the tongue but FRPAA is important legislation that was introduced recently into the U.S. House of Representatives by Representative Mike Doyle (D-PA) and a suite of bipartisan co-sponsors. What exactly is FRPAA and why should you care?

Through various science agencies, like the National Institutes of Health, Uncle Sam gives money – tens of billions of dollars annually – to individuals and universities to do scientific research. Scientists share the results of what they've learned through the publication of articles in scientific journals. These articles contain a wealth of information, including a synthesis of the research with conclusions and recommendations – including the inevitable call for, yes, *more research!* These articles are written for a wide audience including other researchers who may be doing research in a related project, entrepreneurs working in the field, and members of the public who might want to be informed or build upon the conclusions.

Unfortunately, right now, access to these articles is limited and restricted. Access is gained only by those who can afford it. Typically, researchers gain access through a subscription paid for by the library of an institution with which they are affiliated. InterLibrary Loan might be used to get a copy if the Library does not have a subscription – but only if copyright restrictions permit.

What does FRPAA have to do with this? FRPAA would require that federal grant-funding agencies make sure that manuscripts stemming from this taxpayer funded research be made available online no later than six months after publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

Why should you care about FRPAA? First, as a taxpayer you paid for the research. Since the research is funded through public funds, I believe the public has a right to the literature that reports the results. The six-month embargo period protects the business models of publishers which rely on the income from current subscriptions, but the broad accessibility requirement ensures that the public receive the benefit of this research in a more equitable and timely manner.

Lest you think this is an issue relevant in Chicago and Urbana-Champaign but not Carbondale, note that in 2008 (the latest year for which data is available) SIU received more than \$33 million in grants from federal agencies for various research projects. Plus, research activity at SIU is growing and the economic impact of SIU in the region is well known. As the importance of federal research support becomes a greater component of SIU's funding, the importance of research funding to our entire region grows with it.

For SIU's research program to be effective and continue its growth our faculty must have access to research literature. SIU's Morris Library is a strong research library with a national reputation. As such, we do a pretty good job of providing access to the research literature to SIU's researchers but we are losing ground. Last year, Morris Library began a process to reduce journal subscriptions by \$600,000. After working with the faculty, we cancelled nearly 1,000 subscriptions to journals this year.

But I think the most important argument for FRPAA relates to the nature of research itself. As a society, we value research because we want to discover new knowledge and understand more fully the world around us. We want to discover new medicines to combat disease and disabilities; we want to find and use new energy resources to power our homes and cars safely; we want to create more effective fertilizers to increase our food production and enhance disease resistance.

But discoveries and new knowledge, even the most important ones, are valueless unless they are shared and communicated. Knowledge is cumulative; one discovery, one insight, leads to another discovery and a deeper insight. When shared, discoveries can be applied and others can learn and build upon the knowledge gained. Communication is not simply a by-product of research – it is essential to its purpose.

I encourage you to support FRPAA. You paid for the research. You deserve access to it. The position on FRPAA by Congressman Jerry Costello is unclear. As a member of the House Committee on Science and Technology, his support is important. Call or email Mr. Costello's office and tell him that as a constituent you support FRPAA (H.R. 5037).

If you want more information about FRPAA, I recommend the web site of the Alliance for Taxpayer Access at the following URL: www.taxpayeraccess.org



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