

# IS THIS FREE?!

Unpaywall and other tools that allow you to  
bypass the publisher paywall

June 2017

Mariya Maistrovskaya

Institutional Repositories Librarian

[mariya.maistrovskaya@utoronto.ca](mailto:mariya.maistrovskaya@utoronto.ca)

Stephanie Orfano

Copyright Outreach Librarian

Acting Head, Scholarly Communications  
& Copyright Office

[stephanie.orfano@utoronto.ca](mailto:stephanie.orfano@utoronto.ca)



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
LIBRARIES

# Sci-Hub

- Launched in September 2011 by Alexandra Elbakyan, a researcher from Kazakhstan
- Over 62 million papers available
- **Why?**
  - Because she ***“wanted everyone, especially researchers in developing countries, to ‘freely share in scientific advancement’”***
- Sci-hub uses a collection of credentials (user IDs and passwords) belonging to educational institutions to access journals
  - Credentials voluntarily shared



# Library Genesis

- Based in Russia
- No official stats but believed have 50 million articles, 1.5 million non-fiction ebooks, and 1.5 million fiction ebooks
- Allows for individual or bulk downloads via peer to peer torrents
- Pirated content is crowdsourced (direct and indirect)



A dark grey world map with numerous red circles of varying sizes overlaid on it. The circles are most densely packed in Europe and North America, with smaller circles scattered across South America, Africa, and Asia. The text is centered over the map.

Who's downloading pirated papers?

**EVERYONE**

---

In rich and poor countries, researchers turn to the Sci-Hub website.

---

*Who's downloading pirated papers? Everyone* By John Bohannon | Apr. 28, 2016  
<http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2016/04/whos-downloading-pirated-papers-everyone>

# Who's using it?

- Sci-Hub users come from all over the world.
- In the US + Europe, data suggests that users concentrate where academic researchers are working

DOWNLOADS

17188

MAP NAME

Toronto, Canada

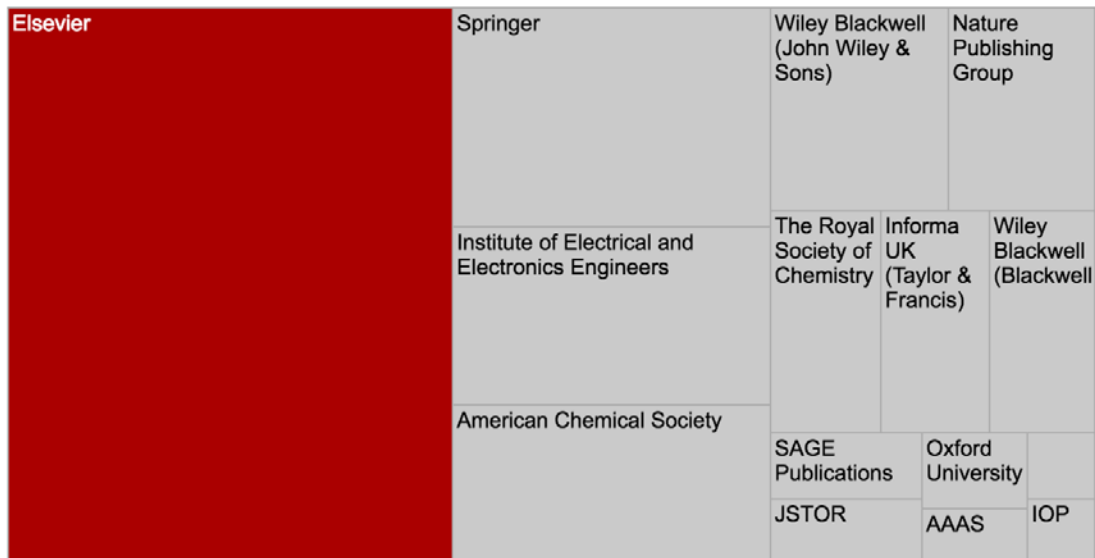
TOP DOI

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-277X.2004.00520.x>



# What are they using?

- Downloads in Sci-Hub skew towards recent publications
  - 35% of articles downloaded were less than two years old when they were accessed
- Publishers with a focus on chemistry and engineering are the most highly accessed



Looking into Pandora's Box: The Content of Sci-Hub and its Usage by: Bastian Greshake

<https://f1000research.com/articles/6-541/v1>

Chart from *Who's downloading pirated papers? Everyone* By John Bohannon | Apr. 28, 2016

<http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2016/04/whos-downloading-pirated-papers-everyone>

# #ICanHazPDF

- Users request articles by tweeting an article's title, DOI or other linked information like a publisher's link, their email address, and the hashtag "#ICanHazPDF"
- Someone who has access to the article will then email it to them
- The user then deletes the original tweet



# Unpaywall

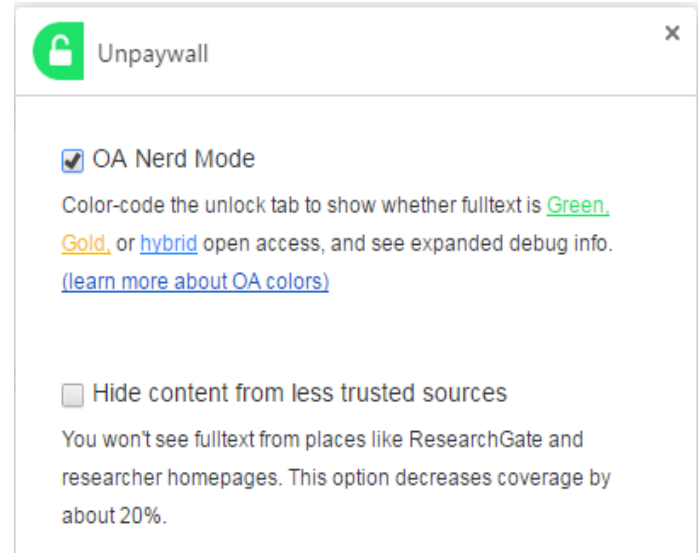
- [Unpaywall](#) is an open source browser extension for Chrome & Firefox developed by [ImpactStory](#).
- It focuses on searching PDFs legally uploaded by the authors themselves by searching across [PubMed Central](#), [the DOAJ](#), [Crossref](#), [DataCite](#), [Google Scholar](#), [BASE](#), [oaDOI](#), etc.
- Unpaywall claims to find fulltext for 50-85% of articles, depending on their topic and year of publication.





# Unpaywall in action

- **Gold tab** = Gold OA ([example](#))
- **Green tab** = Green OA, articles on a preprint server or institutional repository ([example](#))
- **Blue tab** = articles available on the current page, but lacking license information (often when browsing from behind the paywall) ([example](#))



# Open Access Button

- [Open Access Button](#) is an open source search tool and browser extension that began in 2013 and is currently supported by [SPARC](#).
- It searches articles/datasets legally uploaded by the authors themselves across [oaDOI, Share, CORE, OpenAIRE, Dissem.in, Europe PMC, BASE, etc.](#)
- The web interface allows looking up an article/dataset by DOI, PubMed ID, PMC ID, title, or citation
- If an OA version of an article/dataset is not found, you can send a direct request to the author via OAB to share it (success rate: 32 received out of 11800 requests)
- OAB can integrate with library catalogs and interlibrary loan systems



# Open Access Button in action

Use <https://openaccessbutton.org/> or browser extension

- Example - [article on journal's website](#)
- Example - DOI <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0714980813000287>
- Example - citation:

Sutherland, B. R., & Sargent, E. H. (2016). Perovskite photonic sources. *Nature Photonics*, 10(5), 295–302



# Batch searching Unpaywall & OAB (ITS tool)

Enter a single DOI / title

Example: 10.1080/09644016.2011.551024

or

Upload a CSV of DOIs / titles

Choose File No file chosen

Open Access Button

oaDOI (Unpaywall)

Search

Batch check for OA  
accepted manuscripts for  
TSpace upload:

- Checked - 516
- Retrieved - 68 (13%)
- Uploadable - 25 (4%)



# Unpaywall vs Open Access Button

- Both are open source apps and search across mostly the same sources
- OA Button is available both as a web interface and as a browser extension; Unpaywall is only a browser extension
- OA Button is a more mature project (since 2013), and has more features: search by title/DOI/citation, request non-OA articles, integrate with library catalogues and ILL
- Unpaywall focuses on seamlessly finding free content during browsing



# Unpaywall & OAB vs SciHub etc.

- Like Unpaywall & OAB, Sci-Hub finds fulltext PDFs for paywalled articles.
- Difference in source: Unpaywall & OAB find PDFs legally uploaded by the authors themselves, while Sci-Hub uses PDFs that are obtained by other means, including shared credentials & automated web scraping of publisher sites.
- Sci-Hub's method delivers more comprehensive results, but is entirely legal.
- Unpaywall & OAB offer a more sustainable approach by working within copyright law and supporting the growing open access movement.



# A few things to consider...

- Free to access does not always mean free to reuse/repost - check conditions!
- Unpaywall and OAB check legality at the repository (source) level, not article level
- How does this impact the library?



# Sources

- Willi Hooper, M.D., (2017). Review of Unpaywall [Chrome & Firefox browser extension]. Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication. 5(1), p.eP2190. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.7710/2162-3309.2190>
- John Bohannon (Apr. 28, 2016). Who's downloading pirated papers? Everyone. Science. DOI: 10.1126/science.aaf5664
- [John Travis](#) (May. 6, 2016). In survey, most give thumbs-up to pirated papers. Science. DOI: 10.1126/science.aaf5704
- Availability of Freely-Available Articles from Gold, Green, Rogue, and Pirated Sources: How do Library Knowledge Bases Stack Up? ER&L April 4, 2017 <https://www.slideshare.net/MichaelLevineClark/discovery-of-oa-articles>





# Thank you!

**Questions? Ask us!**

