

Seattle University

ScholarWorks @ SeattleU

The Spectator Online

Newspapers

11-16-2022

2022-11-16 Z-Library Shutdown Raises Questions About Educational Accessibility

Natalie Schorr
Seattle University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/spectator-online>

Recommended Citation

Schorr, Natalie, "2022-11-16 Z-Library Shutdown Raises Questions About Educational Accessibility" (2022). *The Spectator Online*. 799.
<https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/spectator-online/799>

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Newspapers at ScholarWorks @ SeattleU. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Spectator Online by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ SeattleU.



The Spectator • November 16, 2022 • <https://seattlespectator.com/2022/11/16/z-library-shutdown-raises-questions-about-educational-accessibility/>

Z-Library Shutdown Raises Questions About Educational Accessibility

Natalie Schorr, Social Media Manager

In an event that has been called the modern day burning of the Library of Alexandria, the popular online shadow library Z-Library has had their domains seized by federal agencies. The website is gone, seemingly for good.

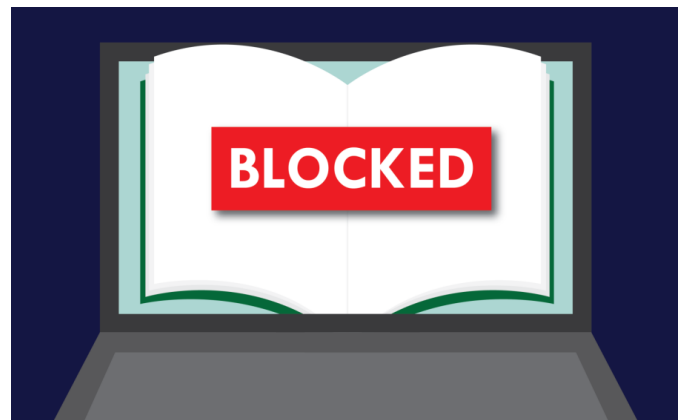
Shadow libraries are sites used to share files for content that is normally behind a paywall, such as academic journal articles or textbooks. For many students like Tarunika Arun, a first year pre-business major, a shadow library is a great way to get resources needed for classes without having to spend lots of money.

“Textbooks are really expensive, and sometimes not available in the library,” Arun said. “[Z-Library] is convenient.”

The reason shadow library sites are not more mainstream is the illegal nature of the distributed content. Many of the books and articles on the websites are pirated and not legally allowed to be circulated by websites like Z-Library.

Steven Tapia, a distinguished practitioner in residence at the Seattle University School of Law says that it is often unclear that content on these websites is up illegally. While some believe that Z-Library is at fault for hosting pirated works, Tapia claims that it is up to copyright owners to police who is using their content.

“Somebody that opens up a platform like Z-Library is not responsible for what third parties put up on a site until someone tells them what’s up there,” Tapia said.



Natalie Schorr

Like Tapia, Science and Engineering Librarian Lydia Bello sees the existence of sites like Z-Library as a part of the information ecosystem, but also as an indicator of student need for access to academic resources.

“The world of textbooks is expensive, and really not in the favor of students,” Bello said. “We are trying to take steps to address it and help the student experience.”

Tapia pointed out that shadow libraries force publishers to reconsider the cost of their goods.

“The publishers are not necessarily the students’ best friend,” Tapia said. “There is something to be said for the fact that this kind of innovation helps drive prices down.”

Now that the site has been taken down, students are concerned about having the resources they need to get the right materials for their classes. With a new quarter on the horizon, some students already have procuring new textbooks on their mind.

“[Z-Library being down] is going to stress me out about how I can get textbooks for the next quarter,” Arun said. “I feel like it will limit my education because my accessibility is affected.”

Seattle U is aware of the issue of accessibility and high cost of textbooks and is making steps to solve the issue. Bello says that the university is currently pushing faculty to use more open access materials in their classes.

“Open education materials are textbooks that are designed to be free for students to use,” Bello said. “We’re trying to set up an infrastructure to help faculty make those choices.”

Bello and other librarians push open educational resources not only to help students at Seattle U, but also to provide access to learners across the globe. Once an open access textbook has been created, it can be used and refined by educators and students without costing an arm and a leg.

“My main priority is making sure that you have access to what you need to be a student and be successful,” Bello said. “I’m always kind of bummed out that student success is tied to the cost of a \$200 textbook or a \$150 problem set that goes with it, and I would like to change that to make sure that doesn’t happen as much here.”

Educational accessibility is a large problem in higher education, and the demise of Z-Library takes away an avenue of access to students who have fewer financial resources. Widespread adoption of open education courseware could help all students experience equal education without needing to resort to an illegal shadow library.