

**AAUP Annual Meeting  
16 June 2006**

**Talk 2**

**Presses and Libraries: One Possible Future**

**Digital Publishing in the University Press Mission, Part II: Outside Players**

*Chair: Mark H. Saunders, University of Virginia Press*

*Panelists: Peter Potter, Editor-in-Chief, Cornell University Press; Rebecca Simon, Associate Director for Journals and Digital Publishing, University of California Press; Martha Nell Smith, Professor of English, Executive Editor and Coordinator, Dickinson Electronic Archives, University of Maryland.*

What will the university press of the future look like? Any discussion of this question must include our colleagues in the world of scholarly communication outside of the press. Which stages in the cycle of digital publishing inspire collaboration with digital incubators, librarians, and scholarly societies, among others? Panelists will describe models for collaboration that have succeeded as well as potential hurdles put up by differing institutional cultures, economies, and expectations.

**I. Introduction.**

I would like to sketch out one possible future for university presses—one in which the press and the library are genuine partners on campus, truly taking advantage of their different but complementary strengths to advance scholarly communication. In this scenario the press, in partnership with the library, publishes a wide range of works—some quite scholarly and some not so scholarly; some as traditional print publications and some that openly exploit the possibilities of new technology.

In this, I must confess a soft spot for monographs. I don't agree with those who say that monographs are no longer necessary or that they will inevitably give way in a digital world. I'm fully prepared to accept that the old university press model for publishing and distributing monographs has about run its course. And I'm also willing to admit that new technologies present a basic challenge to the way scholarship is done, leading to new forms of scholarly communication that we are only just beginning to grasp. At the same time, I believe that the monograph has not yet outlived its usefulness and that there's something to be gained from focusing on the transition of monograph-type scholarship to the digital realm.

So, what might the possible library/press scenario I'm thinking of look like from the press's side?

First, I can see the press dividing its publication program into several different tracks—say 3-4:

1. **Books intended for a general (non-scholarly) audience.** At some presses these might be true trade books. At some state university presses like Penn State, these books are more likely to be regional titles—fulfilling the university's land grant mission. The key, though, is that these are books that presses can still afford to

- publish in traditional print form knowing that they will sell more than a few hundred copies.
2. **Academic books that can still break even or come close to it.** For instance, those in fields such as American history, politics, or religion, where sales are still respectable.
  3. **Academic books in fields that are no longer holding their own.** For instance, those in fields such as literature, especially foreign-language literature and certain areas of history (Latin America, Africa, or early modern Europe).

The first two areas roughly cover their own expenses within the Press's overall budget. The third area doesn't, so the Press and the Library decide that they are going to single out these books, publishing them collaboratively while streamlining costs as much as possible.

- At the moment, the way to do this seems to be publishing online with POD as needed, which saves some up-front production costs as well as warehousing and inventory costs.
- This is what California is doing and it is what Penn State is trying to do. It is also happening outside the U.S., most notably at the Australian National University (ANU).
- The books are basically straightforward monographs. The goal is to take advantage of cost savings made possible by information technologies without necessarily enhancing or embellishing the books with significant hyperlinking technology.
- This is not cost-recovery publishing at the moment, and perhaps it never will be, though there are certainly ways to generate revenue for the online content—e.g. doing away with Open Access and having libraries pay some hosting fee or other content fee. We're not there yet, though, in terms of cost recovery, and the Library and the Press go into this knowing that this is the case.
- At a place like Penn State, the cost of technology (programming, digitization, web-hosting, and access mechanisms such as indexing and metadata) is borne by the Library, while the Press continues to handle editorial, design, and marketing as well as arranging for the POD editions (through a service like LightningSource) and sales and order fulfillment.
- I know that California is even moving toward reducing some of the upfront acquisitions and editorial costs, by using faculty series editors who then handle the peer review. They are not paid, although there's the possibility of a reduction in teaching load—to be funded in a range of ways.

And what is in this for the Libraries?

- As we know, library acquisitions budgets are already through the roof, and most of the money is going directly to for-profit commercial publishers.
- Librarians and university administrators would much rather keep the money within the non-profit scholarly communications system and especially within their own institutions or group of institutions (e.g. CIC, Ivy League, ARL, etc.).
- If Librarians and university administrators could see the long-term prospect of multi-million-dollar acquisitions budgets leveling off with the balance shifting away from high-priced commercial publications and more towards non-profits, they would be delighted.
- Admittedly, the kind of publishing I am talking about here today is primarily in the humanities rather than in STM, where the real price inflation has occurred, but we all know that we're part of the same system, and for those of us committed to publishing in the humanities and social sciences it is important to make the case for our place in the new scholarly communications landscape, the basic contours of which are just beginning to emerge.

My hope is that, in the long run, this becomes a multi-lateral undertaking with different institutions assuming responsibility for different areas. For instance, Penn State might identify Romance Studies as the area it would take on. Another university might take on German literature or Latin American history or African history.

- In each case, the university would offer the infrastructure for publishing the books online in its chosen field or fields. The POD option could also be offered.
- As more and more universities participated, more and more scholarship would be available online, which would then relieve these universities from having to buy print copies of these books, thus freeing up money in library acquisitions budgets to pay for the online publishing.
- A real benefit of this would be the increased access across the globe to the online content—access that simply isn't possible when a print monograph ends up in only 200 North American and European libraries.

Of course, one thing that has to happen for this scenario to be possible is that more of the technological infrastructure has to be in place. The tools have to be readily available to institutions as open source so that they don't have to buy proprietary publishing software or invent their own, non-standardized packages that can travel.

And that's where some of the Mellon-funded initiatives such as JStor, ARTstor, Portico, and DPubS come in. We're gradually building the infrastructure so that more institutions have the tools to publish in the digital realm.

## **Conclusions**

Note that this scenario is not all that far from the past when press budgets were reliant upon libraries buying our scholarly monographs. The link holding each of us together was (and still is) the tenure and promotion system. In the last few decades the system has kind of gotten away from us thanks to the serials crisis, but we still need one another, and it's unclear how the tenure and promotion system will change in the coming decade. The important point, though, is that we're being pushed back into each other's arms—if only we were willing to admit it. The libraries need us for our content (and our publishing skills), and we need the libraries for their technology (and their information skills).

Thankfully, in the interim years we've learned how to become more effective publishers than we were in the 70s and 80s. We've become much more cost-efficient businesses, and we've adapted to the changing marketplace and the demands of technology.

The scenario I've laid out leaves open the possibility that we can still live in both worlds—we can continue to be cost-efficient businesses on the one hand while still retaining our commitment to publishing in fields where the old business model no longer works and a new one is still emerging.