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# University Presses Facing “Enormous Tectonic Shift” in Publishing



by Nancy K. Herther (University of Minnesota Libraries, Twin Cities Campus) <herther@umn.edu>

University presses have worked hard to establish their reputation for high-quality, scholarly monographic and journal publication. In 2011, these presses were poised at the forefront of the transition to eBooks in the research sector. Even then, press directors were quick to point to “enormous tectonic shifts” yet to come in the transition to 21st-century scholarly publishing.

The past three years have seen major changes and challenges to these presses, with potentially competing publishing initiatives from campus libraries and efforts by many universities to re-evaluate the role and organizational structure of their university presses.

University presses are still reeling from efforts of the **University of Missouri Press** to close their press in 2012. In the past few years, more than 20 University presses have been moved administratively to positions under the leadership of campus libraries. Others have faced serious financial and survival issues.

Further, the relationships between these presses and academic libraries have been strained by the ongoing lawsuit brought by three academic publishers against **Georgia State University Library** over fair use and electronic course reserves. Finding pathways for cooperation and collaboration would appear to be a major issue facing both academic libraries and presses today.



## Missouri Learns the Perils of Academic Publishing

Just as higher education is experiencing radical change, so too are many of the institutions — from research libraries to college sports to scholarly presses — that have been pillars of these institutions for years. In May 2012, the **University of Missouri Press** was officially closed, in order to save the University its \$400,000 annual subsidy. Three months later, saved by an aggressive PR campaign to fight the perception of irrelevance of the institution in local newspapers and on campus, the press was reorganized and now reports to the University’s main Columbia campus instead of the University system as a whole.

The story of this press, as **Greg Britton**, Editorial Director, **Johns Hopkins University Press**, described it, “in crisis and how it acted to save itself” became a major plenary session at the **2013 Association of American University Publishers (AAUP)** meeting. Was this a random incident or the first volley in a process



of reassessing the role and value of university presses for the 21st century?

“As, essentially, small businesses, presses are an odd fit on university org charts,” **University of Minnesota Press Director Doug Armato** explains to *ATG* readers, “the ‘comfort’ level really depends on the individual administrator to whom you are reporting, whether President, Provost, Vice President, Dean, or University Librarian. There are an increasing number of strong presses reporting to libraries, and I think the key to success has been a recognition that presses have a different mission — outward-facing rather than campus-facing — and need a degree of operational flexibility and latitude to take risks. Presses are often moved

around administratively. The library reporting line is certainly at least a modest ‘trend’ now, but university structures and traditions vary widely, and I’m not sure that trend will become a norm. If it does, nothing I’ve seen suggests it would be a categorical threat to presses.”

## University Presses Take on Libraries Over Fair Use

The **Georgia State University Libraries** lawsuit, *Cambridge U. Press et al. v. Mark P. Becker et al.*, was filed in April of 2008 by three academic publishers, **Cambridge University Press**, **Oxford University Press**, and **Sage** (supported by the **Association of American Publishers** and with costs partially covered by the **Copyright Clearance Center**) and judgment made in May 2012; yet an appeal is still pending. The case involved charges that the university had violated copyright by making unlicensed course content available to students without getting special permission to do so from publishers.

**Brandon Butler** of the **Association of Research Libraries** noted that, “not only did the CCC and AAP fail to stomp out fair use in the electronic arena, but they wasted a lot of time and resources over what turns out to have been pocket change in terms of actual harm in a typical semester... I’m baffled that the publishers continue to claim that course reserves pose some kind of existential threat to their business.

It was established at trial that **GSU’s** practices are in the mainstream, so libraries are basically already doing what the publishers claim will put

them out of business, and yet **Oxford University Press** reported \$1-billion in sales last year, \$180-million in profits. Is that what a publisher on the verge of collapse looks like?”

The decision to continue to pursue this case has surprised many in the library community, who see this as a very divisive effort on the part of organizations thought by libraries to be their allies. **Kevin Smith**, **Duke’s** Scholarly Communications Officer, sees little to be gained by the publishers: “As I tell folks, the publishers suing **Georgia State** have made an even more foolish decision, since they are suing people who are not just their customers but also their suppliers. The very academics that are vilified as thieves in this lawsuit are the ones who produce



Doug Armato, University of Minnesota Press Director

the content that **Oxford**, **Cambridge**, and **Sage** take, usually for free, to resell at a high profit. This is one reason why the publishers cannot win this case, even if the 11th Circuit follows the ill-logic they displayed at oral arguments and gives the publishers some kind of Phryrrhic [sic] victory. The attention they are bringing to their own greed and mismanagement will drive more of the authors they depend on to stop giving these publishers free content to sell, and the current economics of higher education guarantees that they will not be able to offset their losses through the increased permission fees they dream about. All of this clearly points out the frictions that have emerged between presses and libraries on campuses across the world.”

Although this may seem harsh, it points to a very basic point of departure between university presses and university libraries. At last June’s annual meeting of the **AAUP**, plenary sessions focused on the often uneasy relationships university presses are having with campus libraries and the need to find ways to, as President **Philip Cercone** (Director of **McGill-Queen’s University Press**) remarked, “remain true to our vision...[while] repair[ing] bridges and roads and invest in building new ones” with their campus partners — and libraries in particular.

## Libraries Seek New Roles in Scholarly Publishing

With more than 20 university presses now reporting through campus libraries, changes

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are clearly coming to both organizations. A newly-published directory of library-sponsored publishing efforts clearly describes the breadth of changing in campus publishing. In 2013, more than 50 academic libraries collaborated to establish the **Library Publishing Coalition (LPC)** with administrative coordination from **Educo피아 Institute**. The goal of this group is to explore the current state of library publishing efforts and explore potential alliances: “The Web, information and social media technologies, and the Open Source and Open Access movements are changing the framework in which scholarship is created, collected, organized, and disseminated,” notes **LPC**, arguing that “to flourish, library publishing as a community of practice needs organized leadership to address articulated needs such as targeted training and education, better and increased communication and collaboration, new research, and shared documentation.”



In the **LPC's** first year, they produced a detailed *Directory of Library Publishing Programs*, which covers “existing library publishing services, providing details including staff contacts, types of products produced, and software platforms utilized.” **LPC** noting that “collectively...the libraries profiled in this *Directory* published 391 faculty-driven journals, 174 student-driven journals, 937 monographs, at least 8,746 conference papers and proceedings, and nearly 100,000 each of ETDs and technical/research reports.” Among those libraries — both big and small — already heavily involved in publishing are:

- **Cal Poly**, San Luis Obispo reports having published 52 monographs and 7 peer-reviewed journals.
- **Colby College Libraries** have published 14 books and 2 journals.
- **Columbia University Libraries** have completed 36 monographs and 19 peer-reviewed journals and intends to “pursue new publishing partnerships with scholarly societies through members affiliated with the university.”
- **Georgetown University Libraries** have produced 69 monographs working with “campus departments or programs, individual faculty, graduate students [and] undergraduate students.”
- **Gustavus Adolphus College's Folke Bernadotte Memorial Library** has produced only one monograph, but plans to work “with similar libraries to study the possible launch of a press.”
- **Thomas Jefferson University's Scott Memorial Library** has pro-



duced 5 peer-reviewed journals and 4 monographs.

- **The University of California System's California Digital Library** has published 59 journals (90% are peer-reviewed) and 159 monographs in partnership with the **UC Press**, **PubMed**, **BioMed Central**, and other partners.
- **University of Massachusetts Amherst's W.E.B. DuBois Library** has completed two textbooks, 8 monographs, and 8 peer-reviewed journals, noting that they are “looking into the possibilities of coordinating more closely with our University Press on a variety of services [citing the press] expertise but not [having] the additional time to assist with the types of publishing services faculty are starting to ask for, such as copy-editing, proofing.”

The *Directory* also details those institutions in which university presses now report through their campus libraries. The **LPC** noting that, “as libraries undertake the improvement and expansion of services they will continue to confront a difficult and rapidly changing landscape. Building capacity, sustaining service, and securing funding will require concerted efforts to demonstrate value and improve business models... Libraries will need to convince campus administrators, university presses, librarians, commercial publishers, and content creators that library publishing is an important, strategic, purposeful service area that adds value to the publishing ecosystem.”

“Libraries getting into publishing are forcing presses to reexamine their roles vis-à-vis local constituencies,” consultant and former **Penn State Press Director Sandy Thatcher** notes. “Some presses, like **California**, got their start historically as service agencies for their own universities, publishing just the works of faculty members. Since libraries naturally have this local focus, they are reinventing that old model from early university press days. People like **Kathleen Fitzpatrick**, in her 2011 **NYU Press** book, challenged presses to think about returning to that earlier model.”

The **Amherst College Press** creation is noteworthy; **Thatcher** believes “it is no accident that this new press is going Open Access — because it has been set up within the library at **Amherst**.”

Libraries generally are not used to dealing with the book marketplace and all that it entails from the selling side, so almost inevitably library publishing programs will follow an OA model, just because it is too expensive in terms of staff, procedures, business arrangements, technology, etc., to enter that marketplace.”

Speaking at the **AAUP 2013** meeting, **Purdue's Charles Watkinson** spoke on the impact of “University Press/Library Co-habitation and Collaboration” at his institution, which was physically moved to the **Purdue** libraries in 2009. In 2012, it was renamed **Purdue University Press and Scholarly Publishing Services**. **Watkinson** described three areas of new possibilities being explored: Expanding campus publishing services, perhaps even offering conferences with a stronger base of systematic cost-recovery; better support and capacity for new models of publication (multimedia, data, etc.); and opportunities to expand beyond their strengths in the sciences to other disciplines.



Sandy Thatcher, Penn State Press Director

“There are some universities, like **California**,” **Thatcher** concludes, “where the relationship is not formal, and others, like **MIT**, where there is a formal reporting line but little, if any, collaboration. It's hard to say if any one of these models will come to dominate. I suspect, for the immediate future, the attitude will be ‘let a thousand flowers bloom.’”

### Change — Finding New Opportunities and New Meaning

“Library publishing and university press publishing are complementary services that each provide unique value for the scholarly community,” **LPC's** Program Director **Sarah Lippincott** explains to **ATG** readers. “Libraries are publishing a broad range of content, from e-journals and monographs to ‘gray literature,’ digital humanities projects, datasets, and conference proceedings. Libraries and the **LPC** are working to push the boundaries of ‘publishing’ and what counts as publication, but still see the tremendous value of monographs for scholarship. There are quite a few examples of libraries successfully publishing monographs and even launching their own imprints (**Newfound Press**, **Zea e-Books**).”

“University presses are watching these experiments with great interest and, in some cases, skepticism,” **Lippincott** continues. “University presses have decades of experience, while most libraries are relative newcomers to book publishing. In some ways, though, this positions libraries well to be innovators and

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pioneers in monograph publishing. They are willing and able to experiment with new business models, technologies, and partnerships. In some cases, libraries are able to take on book projects that university presses can't accommodate, for example books on esoteric topics that have little potential to bring in revenue."

"I'd say that presses would likely not worry much about libraries publishing conference proceedings and 'gray' literature as well as data sets and the like," Thatcher believes, "but would worry about monograph publishing and perhaps journal publishing also (if the press at the university has a journals publishing program). One interesting field that a few libraries are exploring is textbook publishing, as at SUNY-Geneseo.

I think this makes a lot of sense because it has a campus focus, drawing authors from the faculty and preparing the textbooks to be used in courses at the university. Only a few presses have gotten involved with this kind of effort at Florida and Temple, so there would probably not be much resistance from presses to this type of initiative. If presses were to revert to the 'service agency' model, however, they might eye this business as an activity they may want to run."

### Future Challenges for Both Press and Libraries

"Monograph publishing has also been a fruitful area for collaboration between libraries and university presses," Lippincott notes. "In one collaborative model, the press contributes

editorial expertise and distribution mechanisms for print media, while the library provides sophisticated technology for digital versions of the monograph or supplemental material."

"Most university press publishers recognize that there are publishing needs on campuses that presses cannot meet and see professional dissemination of scholarship on whatever economic model as a positive good," Armato points out to ATG readers. "We are also used to competing, both with each other and with other kinds of publishers. As library publishing takes shape, we'd all like to see an active dialogue between those units and the presses; going forward, we could all learn from each other, particularly to the extent that Open Access models take hold."

"The eBook transition has been a major hurdle," Armato discloses, "but that is well underway with the success of the University



Press Content Consortium (UPCC) and some early strong signs at both Books at JSTOR and the expansion of the Oxford Scholarship Online (OSO) platform to content from other presses, not to mention aggressive growth at commercial plat-

forms such as ProQuest/ebrary and EBSCO/NetLibrary. In some ways, the biggest challenge in the academic library market is that it hasn't transitioned to electronic fast enough and presses are still running parallel print and digital systems for library products, which is costly."

### Looking at Future Challenges

Having these partnerships or collaborations focuses both libraries and presses on developing and respecting separate and shared missions. They offer a support structure of business and administrative services and a chance

to move from annual funding to at least salaries coming from general funds, giving staff greater job security. The potential for synergy is also mentioned often, as these alliances provide a broader diversity of perspectives, skills, and talents as well as the opportunity to experiment with the libraries — and other campus partners — on 21st-century learning materials and scholarly works. At the same time, these mergers mean a loss of independence and the need to grow mutual understanding and respect. Some mention the potential threat to the press' reputation; however, at this point there appears to be little evidence of damage to-date.

However, there are even larger issues facing higher education that impact both research libraries and presses alike. "The next challenge," Armato believes, "is how the very value of humanities and social science research — the heart of most university press programs — seems to be increasingly called into question. You could almost say that the 'Serials Crisis' that preceded the 'Monograph Crisis' that then became the 'Crisis in Scholarly Publishing' has now escalated into the full-scale 'Crisis in the Humanities.' Presses are only as healthy as their markets, and as universities disinvest in humanities and social science research faculty positions and as graduate programs in those areas shrink, presses will find their core constituency under even greater stress than in the past decade of economic recession."

There has been enormous change in scholarly publishing in the past two years, with only the assurance that more change is on the horizon. 🌱

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## Bet You Missed It

### Press Clippings — In the News — Carefully Selected by Your Crack Staff of News Sleuths

Column Editor: **Bruce Strauch** (The Citadel)

*Editor's Note: Hey, are y'all reading this? If you know of an article that should be called to Against the Grain's attention ... send an email to <kstrauch@comcast.net>. We're listening! — KS*



### BIG BUCKS FOR POTBOILERS by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Mary McCarthy was a feared and revered writer in literary quarterlies and the author of four novels before she hit it big with *The Group* in 1963. The orgasm scene in Chapter 2 had the nation buzzing. And the *Sidney Lumet* movie of 1966 hit smack in the middle of the sexual revolution.

The Vassar class of 1933 that saw themselves in the eight characters were furious and the reviews were catty, savage, scathing. But the public ate it up and made Mary a rich intellectual.

And that was the real trauma for the intelligentsia — the idea you could actually make money off writing. And they weren't doing it.

See — Laura Jacobs, "Vassar Unzipped," *Vanity Fair*, July, 2013, p.88.

### HOUSE OF BOOKS by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

You really need the pictures to appreciate this. Pulitzer-winning author Doris Kearns Goodwin and husband live in an 1850s house in Concord, New Hampshire. With 20,000 books in floor-to-ceiling bookcases. Each room has a book theme: fiction, sports, biography, etc. The converted barn is a waiting room for books to be given away. The three-car garage has her 1,000-book Lincoln collection.

Concord was home to Louisa May Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau et. al. Doris grooves on that.

See — Doris Kearns Goodwin, "Lincoln in a Three-Car Garage," *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 17, 2014, p.M8.