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The Evolution[s] of WLU Press: Towards Library– University Press Integration

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Abstract

In March 2015, Wilfrid Laurier University administration announced that WLU Press would be integrating with the Laurier Library. Media coverage of this announcement has been mixed, and is an indication of the ambivalent response to library-press collaborations or integrations, in both the university press and library communities. This article considers the WLU case at its current early stage of development, discussing this transformation not necessarily as “progress” but as one response to a rapidly shifting scholarly environment. By examining the pressure points of the negotiations to merge the press and the library at WLU, this article considers the question of how to maximize opportunities and minimize the potential negative impacts of such integration. In order for such a partnership to be successful, both must be willing to evaluate their business models, their core missions within the

scholarly ecosystem and the marketplace, as well as how they measure professionalization and success.

Keywords: university press, library, scholarly communication

Background

Wilfrid Laurier University is a mid-sized comprehensive doctorate-granting institution with four campuses and an FTE of around 17,000 located in Southern Ontario. Started in 1912 as the Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, which still exists as part of the institution today, the university continues to grow and expand. The library serves all Laurier campuses and houses its collection at the Waterloo, Kitchener, and Brantford campuses as well as at an offsite storage facility shared among the TriUniversity Group (TUG), which includes the University of Waterloo and the University of Guelph. TUG has a shared catalogue, shared policies, and collaborates on many services and initiatives. Additionally, the library is active in the Ontario Council of University Libraries (OCUL) and the Canadian Research Knowledge Network (CRKN). Wilfrid Laurier University Press (WLUP) was founded in 1974, initially inspired by a need expressed by the Seminary faculty and the Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion for a publishing venue for Canadian scholarship in religious studies. The breadth of the publishing program has developed and grown considerably over the history of the press to include award-winning publications in a range of disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, most notably life writing, literary studies, film and media studies, music, and social work. In 2014, the press was the fourth largest English language university press in Canada, with

a frontlist output of 39 titles in 2014, a backlist of over 550 titles, total revenue of 1.6 million in fiscal 2013–2014, and ten staff members.¹

The institutional context leading up to the library-press merger was that from 2012 to 2014, Laurier undertook an extensive program of prioritization, locally labelled Integrated Planning and Resource Management (IPRM),² based on Robert C. Dickeson’s methodology outlined in his book *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services*. The university also publically stated that, like many Ontario universities, it faced a budgetary crisis in 2015, with a projected \$25-million deficit on its overall annual operating budget of over \$200 million.³ While the IPRM process met with some resistance by faculty and other stakeholders,⁴ University President Dr. Max Blouw publicly stated that there was “no direct relationship” between the IPRM recommendations and the budgetary cuts implemented, including several press positions.⁵ These factors contributed to the decision by university administration to fully phase out the press’ institutional subsidy, which in fiscal 2014 accounted for 24.7% of its total revenue at approximately \$400,000.⁶ This in turn led to an intensive planning process in December 2014 to evaluate the feasibility of bringing the press under the administrative structure of the library without that fiscal support. The financial goals of this move are still in progress and involve significant challenges, including reconciling radically different budgetary models and seemingly oppositional stakeholder demands and funding requirements. The purpose of this article is not to critique either the IPRM or the budgetary processes at Laurier, although an informed discussion of this

particular case must acknowledge that both played a role in bringing the library and the press to their current position. Rather, this article will focus on the strategic and operational issues arising from the process of library–press integration currently underway at Laurier that the administrative team — including the authors — have been contending with as the process moves forward.

It is important to note that the press and the library had an established, ongoing relationship and a collaborative approach that was being actively strengthened, laying the foundation for great potential for this restructuring, though its initial stages of planning were rapid and unexpected. The University Librarian has held a seat on the press editorial board since 2008, including both the former and incumbent librarians, Sharon Brown and Gohar Ashoughian. The previous Head of Collection Development and Acquisitions, Carol Stephenson, and previous Press Director, Brian Henderson, worked closely together on a number of initiatives, including the establishment of an institutional repository and the creation of a shared Digital Projects Coordinator position whose time is split between the press and the library. Co-operative early participation in discussions around consortial e-book purchasing also contributed to a groundbreaking deal between the Ontario Council of University Libraries and the Association of Canadian University Presses/eBound for purchasing all Canadian university press output. Building on that, the current Head of Collection Development and Acquisitions, Charlotte Innerd (author), and Director, Lisa Quinn (author), have been

working closely on institutional responses and educational efforts focused on author rights and responsibilities, Open Access, and a range of broader scholarly communication issues. This base of collaboration contributed to an environment where difficult questions around the evolving publishing landscape, the changing scholarly ecosystem, and roles of the press and the library were already being openly explored.

Libraries and Presses as Partners

Laurier is not the first to undertake this route: longer standing institutional examples of press–library integration include Purdue, University of Michigan, and University of Calgary, and more recent (post-Laurier) examples of integration or shifts in reporting relationships include Texas Tech University, University of Akron, and University of Alberta with numbers on the rise. Much can be learned from similar partnerships and the current discussions on library–press partnerships, and the discourse is divided on the position that integration of press and library is either an efficient or effective solution to the practical problems currently facing scholarly publishing. Joseph Esposito points out that “‘partnership,’ alas, is often a euphemism for an unequal relationship ... [l]et’s choose our words carefully and not invoke partnerships and collaborations when in fact we mean simple vendor–customer relationships or a matter of one unit being subordinated to another.” He asks, “[w]hat value is being added by putting the entities together even if only for a limited time on a single project?”⁷ This is a fundamental question, and there is no simple answer in the case of any library–press partnership.

There are several practical and philosophical responses in the Laurier case. Organizationally, this arrangement provides an increasingly logical home for the press under the library. The library is moving to position itself as a major cultural centre on campus and within the local community, a strategy that has also brought the university's Robert Langen Art Gallery into the library fold under institutional circumstances similar to those of the press.⁸ The library and the press have an overlap in vision, as both are active participants, albeit from different positions, in the dissemination of scholarship, particularly Canadian scholarship. This shared interest and the differences in approach create the opportunity for sharing and learning. It is widely recognized that scholarly infrastructure in Canada is under serious strain. One of the benefits to this model of integration is the opportunity to educate both the library and the press to the needs, interests, and operational requirements of the other as well as those of shared stakeholders in order to maximize use of resources and explore revenue generation from a range of sources, both market and non-market based. In the more team-based, research-enterprise approach to academic research currently gaining traction, there is an increasing convergence of the roles of researcher, librarian, editor, publisher, and other research support positions (grant officers, ethics, knowledge mobilization, etc.). This brings with it a re-evaluation of the nature of these contributions, and how credit and responsibility for that labour should be assumed and recognized. The measure of a successful contribution from any one of these roles varies in metric. For the press, it may be material capital

in the form of sales, or symbolic capital in the form of prestigious awards or publicity (which may or may not translate into sales, but have significant impact on a discipline or field of study the publishing program supports). For the library, the measurement may be in usage statistics or student satisfaction, while for the researcher, in impact via citations, or tenure and promotion. The loss of the institutional operating subsidy for the press at Laurier means that a critical consideration will need to be undertaken of the difference between a model that is revenue generating, versus one that is revenue driven (or at the least revenue agnostic). This is a subtle difference but one that will have an impact on publishing decisions and the ongoing development of the scholarly publisher's list.

From a practical point at this early stage, what Esposito points out as the most common area for partnership was indeed the starting point at Laurier: "If there is a partnership to be forged here, it's on the level of the functional areas."⁹ There are overlapping functional areas in which integration has begun incrementally — in this case technical and financial support — building efficiency as shared or complimentary processes and perspectives become clear through practice. It would be disappointing, however, if the partnership were to stop at this level. Esposito continues to note that "[b]oth libraries and presses are better off pursuing their own aims, cooperating when it is useful, working separately when it is not."¹⁰ This is an important observation for, as much as there are overlaps functionally and philosophically, there are also places where it makes little sense to co-operate. The exciting part of this venture will be

finding out where co-operation should occur and where it should not. To find the benefits, to be innovative, to challenge the existing status quo will require the relationship to be tested, stressed, challenged, examined, and explained internally and externally. As Rick Anderson points out, “it seems to me much more likely that those things will happen if the press and the library are structurally connected — their leadership meeting together frequently and regularly, issues of mutual concern being discussed constantly, and initiatives and projects being carried out in an environment of close mutual association.”¹¹

Although at Laurier there had been some collaboration between the library and the press, the integration now in process facilitates a different level of partnership through “close mutual association” in a way that did not previously exist. It requires a significant revisioning from a relationship of co-operation to a relationship of true integrated collaboration. This process will include an examination and evaluation of not only of the processes of publication but also of respective mission and values. The outcome will yield an identification and articulation of key values revolving around how to improve both the institutional and larger scholarly community’s commitment to investing in quality resources at every stage of their development, production, dissemination, and use. Watkinson argues that as “[e]xperts in scholarly information management, situated on university and college campuses, supported in varying degree by the same funding sources, and sharing many philosophical ideals, librarians and university press publishers seem to be

logical partners.”¹² He continues to identify three challenges of what he terms “pubrarianship”: “articulating the value of publishing to library colleagues, shaping the merged publishing program, and protecting existing brands while embracing new opportunities.”¹³ This conceptual role suggests the need for development of a truly hybrid approach to scholarly publication and dissemination of research that is something more than “library as publisher” or a simple reporting relationship of the press to the library can accomplish.

Watkinson’s three challenges of “pubrarianship” are at the forefront of the development of an integrated press–library model at Laurier. The wording of the IPRM recommendations regarding the press indicates the obvious need for university presses to continue making a strong argument for the core function and value of publication within the academy and to do so to library colleagues, the larger scholarly community, and most importantly key administrators both institutionally and nationally. One significant benefit to the press of integration will be gaining a powerful campus ally in communicating our value, while the library gains a means of production and creative engagement outside institutional bounds. As Watkinson notes, “... [p]artners in an effective library/press collaboration gain enhanced capacity to better serve the changing needs of the scholars who are their key clients and advance the reputation of the institution that pays their salary.”¹⁴ Serving stakeholder needs, both institutional and extra-institutional, will be a key factor in developing and evaluating the integrated publishing program at Laurier, including the degree

to which such a program engages with the marketplace, a fundamental mechanism for the dissemination of scholarly writing.

Pressure Points

As the integration at Laurier proceeds, pressure points are being identified and conversations are happening that build on what is in play both locally and within the larger scholarly publishing and library communities. They deal with some major issues, the largest of which are that the library–publisher relationship is often adversarial or oppositional in nature, and that university presses are dealing with increasing challenges of scholarly book publishing in a rapidly shifting economy and marketplace. These fundamental issues are complex and highly distributed, but both are vitally important to the establishment of a well-functioning relationship and relate to the issue of business models. A consideration of strategic and operational pressure points can be instrumental in gathering and organizing these distributed threads.

Differences in the business models of university presses and libraries are one of the most important and challenging aspects of partnership to reconcile. Most university presses in Canada, even those operating under an open access mandate, are working on at the least a partial cost-recovery basis, although those expectations vary from institution to institution. The fiscal responsibility of any one institution¹⁵ in supporting the dissemination of Canadian scholarship under the current university press distributed model¹⁶ has been a significant subject of debate regarding the future of WLU Press. On one side is the position represented by the Laurier IPRM recommendation, which claims

that the university press “is not essential to the vision and mission of the university.”¹⁷ The other is a call to recognition of the responsibility of universities to make a substantial commitment to the dissemination of scholarship, as articulated by the Association of Canadian University Presses in their open letter of March 2015 in response to the confirmation of the elimination of WLU Press’ operating subsidy as a component of the library–press merger.¹⁸ This debate suggests a question politically unpopular in a climate of economic austerity: not whether university presses should be independently financially viable, but whether they should be expected to be. To what degree and under what model should scholarly publishing be funded as a core component of the post-secondary research institution, and what are the most equitable and efficient mechanisms to distribute those costs? These will be key questions moving forward.

While institutional support is a key source of revenue for most university presses in Canada, the primary source of revenue is sales of content in a variety of formats — print books, e-books, digital short publications, scholarly journals (print and digital) — and through a variety of rapidly proliferating channels, including direct to consumer, print book wholesalers and retailers, libraries, and a wide range of e-book platforms including iTunes, Kindle, and Kobo. Revenue is also generated through grants from sources including the Canada Council, the Canada Book Fund, various provincial arts councils and funding bodies, the Award to Scholarly Publications program, and indirectly through individual project funding bodies such as SSHRC, NSERC, or CIHR. In

addition, the vast majority of university presses comparable in size and scale to WLU Press receive some degree of institutional support in the form an operating subsidy. At Laurier, elimination of that subsidy will be a significant challenge, as that support fell well within the range of those received within our cohort as benchmarked by the American Association of University Presses' annual survey¹⁹ (most Canadian university presses belong to AAUP, along with membership in the Association of Canadian University Presses).

In contrast, the library operates under a budget allocation model provided entirely by the university. Although the library expends much time and effort in demonstrating its importance and in responding to changes in technology and academia, the centrality of the library to the teaching and research mission of the university is generally accepted and understood. The library's budget has traditionally been based on historical spending and the ability of the library to articulate its needs for additional funding to innovate and meet student and faculty demands. The library's goal is to spend wisely, efficiently, and as fully as possible within the budget provided. Both presses and libraries are currently under significant budgetary pressure but in vastly different ways. Libraries at Canadian postsecondary institutions are struggling with vendor-imposed annual increases to the cost of e-resources and the fluctuation in the Canadian dollar, as much of the acquisition budget is spent in US dollars. Both stressors functionally mean increased pressure on the monograph budget. University presses have their own budgetary pressures, one of which includes shrinking library markets due to the issues above,

although there is increasing discussion about the fading centrality of the library market to the bottom line in sales as presses increasingly diversify their publishing programs and sales strategies to compensate for reduced library revenues.²⁰

Another pressure on sales for Canadian university presses has been the addition of the education exception to fair dealing in Canadian copyright law, and the concomitant collapse of the licensing model administered by Access Copyright. Interpretation of the limits to fair dealing is still unresolved, but the on-the-ground effect has been lost revenue for university presses. Presses are still gathering and analyzing data regarding these recent changes, but on an anecdotal basis, the consensus among university presses has been that since the legal change, direct permission requests for usage have dropped off considerably, and revenues through Access Copyright have been substantially reduced. Whether these uses will be determined to fall legally under fair dealing has yet to be determined, as final decisions in key court cases are still pending. Integration of an established press within the library at Laurier will mean the opportunity to have practical, in-the-trenches discussions around balancing the tension between the rights and responsibilities of creators and those of users, and around the expectations for the press to generate revenue from the scholarship it publishes versus the internal pressure on libraries and other users to pay less for it.

This discussion needs to encompass not only fair dealing and budgetary pressures fuelled by technological and legislative change, but within the

Canadian context what often prove in practice to be contradictory requirements and metrics of successful publishing activities from funders across the support spectrum. Open Access is one such pressure point for these contradictions, as university presses are currently grappling with how to manage Open Access mandates increasingly attached to Tri-Council funded research projects that often do not explicitly or adequately support the costs of publication equitably for all stakeholders in the process. These mandates are concerned with addressing broad access to publicly funded scholarship rather than addressing the full costs of producing that scholarship in publication. Meanwhile, the evaluative structures of industry supports such as the Canada Book Fund employ economic metrics in determining grant amounts primarily by sales, with little consideration or acknowledgement for the principle of access outside the mechanism of the marketplace. As university presses are hybrid entities — non-profit organizations with the mission to support the dissemination of scholarship but also participants in the market economy of publishing — they find themselves walking an increasingly high tightrope in their business decisions.

Despite any overlap in vision and values, there are also notable differences, and a key one revolves around the issue of curatorship. Presses and libraries are both curators of collections but with vastly different approaches. University presses are directly engaged with content development, evaluation and production, alongside an assessment of the market or audience for a particular work; the editorial and vetting processes they undertake

serving a credentialing function as well. This engagement is first-copy resource intensive, so presses must be highly selective of the projects in which they invest. Kathleen Fitzpatrick has warned of the dangers for university presses of articulating their value solely through their credentializing role, arguing instead that the value of university presses is in their core publishing functions: substantive editing and development of content, production, distribution, and marketing.²¹ Similarly, Joe Esposito argues the “business of certification” is a very different business from making publishing decisions or “the business of dissemination,”²² although in practice these functions are deeply interwoven. Libraries are more concerned with facilitating access to resources as determined by user needs, and most library publishing programs reflect the desire to provide the widest possible access to a venue of publication for their user base. These approaches reflect how library and press budgets are determined and perceived, as well as the deeper implications of the difference in socioeconomic worldview between models of budget allocation and revenue generation.

Scholarly publishers and libraries have at times an odd relationship. Charles Watkinson notes that “[u]niversity presses and academic libraries should be natural allies in the quest to create a more equitable scholarly publishing system.”²³ They are dependent on each other and have similar values and goals as has been briefly outlined. Yet, the relationship is often seen as adversarial. In evolving these relationships, it is important to consider the differences among publishers and libraries: that the role of a trade or for profit

publisher is different from that of a university press, just as the role of a public library is different from that of an academic library. If presses want to advance developments in scholarly publishing in conjunction with libraries, how can we develop a relationship that is not adversarial but still allows us to fully address and work to resolve these difficult and complex problems? One option is to begin with this type of integration between university presses and university libraries. By forging a new kind of relationship, groundwork can be laid not only for a scholarly publishing system adapted to a changing information environment but also better relations between publishers and libraries working toward shared goals. This will require a larger environmental paradigm shift and a willingness to take operational risks on both sides, and what is happening at Laurier will play a part in what is to come.

¹ This figure includes the institutional operating grant.

² Laurier's IPRM Report, 2014:

http://legacy.wlu.ca/documents/59911/%2A%2A%2A%2AIPRM_Report_and_Recommendations.11.26.14.pdf

³ Johanna Weidner, "Laurier eliminates 22 support jobs, faculty reductions planned," *Waterloo Region Record*, 10 March 2015, <http://www.therecord.com/news-story/5468890-laurier-eliminates-22-support-jobs-faculty-reductions-planned/>.

⁴ Pender, Terry, "Report on Laurier program cuts not supported by most faculty," 2 January 2015, <http://www.therecord.com/news-story/5236776-report-on-laurier-program-cuts-not-supported-by-most-faculty/>

⁵ Weidner.

⁶ Institutional subsidies vary significantly in both the Canadian and American university press publishing context, ranging from presses with no operational support, such as University of Toronto Press, to those with substantive fiscal institutional support, such as Athabasca University Press, which operates with an open access mandate. According to the American

Association of University Presses, 55 of 66 reporting presses across North America received some level of operational support, with Group 1 presses (to which WLU Press belongs) averaging annual operating grants of \$412,650. AAUP, “Annual University Press Statistics: 2011 through 2014,” February 2015, <http://www.aaupnet.org/resources/for-members/data-collection-and-analysis/403-aaup-operating-statistics#sthash.dtdR78ZB.dpuf>

- ⁷ Joseph Esposito, “Having Relations with the Library: A Guide for University Presses,” *The Scholarly Kitchen*, 16 July 2013, <http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2013/07/16/having-relations-with-the-library-a-guide-for-university-presses/>.
- ⁸ Laurier Communications, Public Affairs & Marketing, “Laurier plans to integrate Robert Langen Art Gallery into University Library,” 10 April 2015, https://legacy.wlu.ca/news_detail.php?grp_id=28&nws_id=13915&filter_type=release.
- ⁹ Esposito.
- ¹⁰ Esposito.
- ¹¹ Rick Anderson, “Another Perspective on Library–Press ‘Partnerships,’” *The Scholarly Kitchen*, 23 July 2013, <http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2013/07/23/another-perspective-on-library-press-partnerships/>.
- ¹² Charles Watkinson, “From Collaboration to Integration: University Presses and Libraries,” in M. Bonn and M. Furlough, Eds., *Getting the Word Out: Academic Libraries as Scholarly Publishers* (Chicago: ACRL, 2015), 83.
http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/publications/booksanddigitalresources/digital/9780838986981_getting_OA.pdf
- ¹³ Charles Watkinson, “Three Challenges of Pubrarianship.” *Against the Grain* 26.6 (2015): 22–25, http://works.bepress.com/charles_watkinson/9
- ¹⁴ Watkinson, p. 102.
- ¹⁵ Note the free rider problem with which the current model struggles. There are a number of Carnegie Mellon funded initiatives in process, including a pilot to determine monograph first-copy costs as a necessary first step in structuring alternative business models based on a “creator pay to publish” framework: <http://www.aaupnet.org/aaup-members/news-from-the-membership/collaborative-publishing-initiatives>
- ¹⁶ Whereby a press publishes work based on developed and curated lists determined by both quality of scholarship and market forces, rather than by institutional affiliation of authors, which counterproductively opens researchers and presses up to claims of vanity publishing. This is a larger cultural issue that requires considerable unpacking.
- ¹⁷ Laurier’s IPRM Report.
- ¹⁸ Laurier Communications, Public Affairs & Marketing, “WLU Press to Integrate with Laurier Library: Integration Will Preserve WLU Press While Supporting Development of New Culture & Learning Commons,” 11 March 2015, <https://www.wlu.ca/media/news-releases/march->

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- [2015/wlu-press-to-integrate-with-laurier-library.html](http://www.wlu-press-to-integrate-with-laurier-library.html); Association of Canadian University Presses, “Open Letter — Wilfrid Laurier University Press,” 26 March 2015, <http://www.acup.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/WLUP-Open-Letter-March-2015.pdf>
- ¹⁹ AAUP, “Annual University Press Statistics.”
- ²⁰ Rick Anderson and Dean Blobaum, “How Important Are Library Sales to the University Press? One Case Study,” *The Scholarly Kitchen*, 23 June 2014, <http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2014/06/23/how-important-are-library-sales-to-the-university-press-one-case-study/>
- ²¹ Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology, and the Future of the Academy* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).
- ²² Joseph Esposito, “The Business Model is a Community Affair,” 1 July 2014, *The Scholarly Kitchen*, <http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2014/07/01/the-business-model-is-a-community-affair/>
- ²³ Watkinson, p. 83.