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Indiana University Press

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The Future of University Presses

Indianapolis, Indiana, 12–14 November 2004

Janet Rabinowitch

Thank you very much for inviting me to speak with you this morning. From our experience at Indiana University Press (IUP) with textual editing and documentary editions (we have published two MLA editions), I hold documentary editors in awe—for your meticulousness, thoroughness, patience, and creative problem solving. I'm acquainted most closely with the *Writings of Charles S. Peirce*, edited by the Peirce Project at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), of which IUP is the proud publisher. Indiana was also the publisher of the *Selected Writings of William Dean Howells* (15 volumes between 1968 and 1991).

Just to acquaint you briefly with IUP, we are located on the Bloomington campus of Indiana University. We were founded in 1950, have published some 5000 titles since then, currently have around 1800 titles in print, and at present publish 140 to 150 new books a year and 25 scholarly journals, mainly in the humanities and social sciences. Our publishing program reflects academic strengths of the university—we have established lists of long standing in music, history, literary studies, philosophy, women's studies, world area studies (Russia and East Europe, Africa, Middle East, Asia), Jewish and Holocaust studies, and religion.

The "future of university presses" is an open-ended topic, and I don't pretend to be a crystal ball gazer, so I will focus my remarks more directly on trends and issues that are currently preoccupying my university press colleagues, developments that will have a strong influence on what our future is likely to be.

A few words first about what it is that university presses do now and that they will continue to do into the future. There are at present roughly 125 university presses that are full, affiliate, or associate members of the Association of American University Presses. Here are some of the things that university presses do—and do well:

1. Make available to the broader public the range and value of research generated by university faculty.
2. Present the basic research and analysis that is drawn upon by policy makers and opinion leaders, as well as scholars.
3. Contribute to the variety and diversity of cultural expression at a time of increasing homogenization in the media industry.
4. Promote engagement with ideas and sustain a literate culture.
5. Help to preserve the distinctiveness of local cultures through publication of works on the regions in which they are based.
6. Give voice to minority cultures and perspectives through publication programs in ethnic, racial, and gender studies.
7. Rediscover and maintain the availability of works important to scholarship and culture.
8. Sponsor work in specialized and emerging areas of scholarship.
9. Through the peer review process, test the soundness of scholarship and thereby maintain high standards for academic publication.
10. Add value to scholarly work through rigorous editorial development; professional copyediting and design; and world-wide dissemination.
11. Commit resources to long term scholarly editions and multivolume research projects, assuring publication for works with completion dates far in the future—something that is particularly important for this group.
12. Extend the reach and influence of their parent institutions and generate favorable publicity for them throughout the world. (I'm often told by foreign scholars that they know of Indiana University because they have Indiana University Press books on their bookshelves or subscribe to our journals.)

These are just some of the points from a list prepared as part of the celebration of the Year of the University Press, proclaimed in 2004 by the AAUP together with the Association of Research Libraries to encourage the collaboration of libraries and university presses.

While celebrating the achievements of university presses, the year 2004 has also brought the near closure of several smaller presses because of financial difficulties. The same pressures and trends that led to the near demise of these small presses affect larger university presses as well. They include shrinking and increasingly fragmented markets for academic books, the pro-

gressive weakening of the library market, the volatility of the market for textbooks (as a result of the growing popularity of course packs and changes in students' book buying and studying habits—spending more time on the Web than in the library), changes in the book trade (the demise of independent book stores and the concentration of sales in the chains, which require high discounts and generate high returns), the high costs involved in keeping up with new technologies in all aspects of publishing, and pressure to provide easy electronic access to scholarly publications. At the same time university support for many presses is minimal and/or decreasing. In the present publishing environment, university presses can't make ends meet just by publishing academic books. While technology presents exciting new horizons, it also raises seemingly insurmountable challenges. Putting all these factors together, university presses are in a time of tremendous change.

How are university presses responding to these changes? In what directions are they moving?

I shall mention some of the directions we're pursuing at our own press, which I think are in general representative of trends in university press publishing:

1. We're placing an increasing emphasis on regional publishing—books about Indiana and the Midwest that are aimed at a broad regional audience—titles about nature, history, literature, food, gardening, music, culture, ethnic groups. Last fall, we launched a new imprint, Quarry Books, to promote and market our regional offerings to Indiana and Midwest audiences. We see our regional publications as being of service to the citizens of the State of Indiana, a form of public outreach extending the influence of the university.
2. We're planning our lists more carefully, with a balance of trade, monographic, text, and reference books. We seek out "cutting edge" academic books that reach across disciplines and subject areas to a broad swath of academic readers. We are focusing our lists in our areas of major strength and encourage crossover books that reach across disciplines and areas. While we also continue to publish specialized scholarship in our areas of strength, the print runs are becoming smaller and smaller. It is not unusual for a prize-winning scholarly work to sell no more than 500 or 600 copies.
3. We're making increasing use of Print on Demand and short-run printing technologies to keep slow-selling works in print

that would not sustain regular offset reprinting. Preparing books for Print on Demand also converts them into formats that can be adapted and repurposed for digital dissemination.

4. We're growing our journals program. Journals publishing involves a much more favorable economic model than book publishing. With journals, subscription income is collected before the issues are printed, whereas with books, cash is tied up in inventory over many years. Although the trend in print subscriptions is downward, income from electronic dissemination of our journals through our own document delivery and through Project Muse and other aggregators is steadily increasing.

5. While we have not engaged in digital book publishing at Indiana as yet, we are exploring possibilities for collaborating with university programs that are involved in digital projects. (We have published several interactive multimedia CD-ROMs in collaboration with the Teaching and Learning Technologies Lab at IU, and our journals program offers online document delivery.)

Various of our sister presses have taken the plunge into exciting digital publishing ventures. Most of these digital projects involve collaborations between the university press and other university units, usually the library and the university's IT resources. Most are pilot projects, funded by grants, usually from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Longterm sustainability of these initiatives, once grant funding ends, is still very much an open question.

What directions do these developments presage for university presses?

1. Adaptation to electronic publishing, proceeding hand in hand with print publishing. With the possibility, indeed necessity, of archiving electronic copies of all publications, which can be used for multiple purposes, university presses are moving toward finding ways to maintain all their content (books as well as journals) in digital form. This opens the possibility of publishing in multiple formats—in print, online, or in downloadable form.

2. The preservation of books in digital formats makes it possible to keep slow-selling books in print for the long term. It also allows for creation of databases of books, along the lines of the Bibliovault Project at the University of Chicago Press, with

searchable capabilities, that can be licensed to libraries, schools, and individuals around the world.

3. There is a need for new publishing models to underwrite the costs of these technology-intensive modes of publication. It will take teamwork and collaboration among the various academic “players” involved in the process of producing, publishing, disseminating, and consuming scholarly work. Universities pay for the production and dissemination of scholarship in several ways: they pay the salaries of faculty producing scholarship; they fund library purchases of the fruits of scholarship; in some cases, they may subsidize university presses.

How can these costs be managed more effectively within the scholarly community? This is a question that is being asked in particular with relation to scientific journals and the exorbitant prices charged by the large commercial publishers who dominate that market, such as Elsevier, Springer, and Blackwell, depleting the budgets of university libraries. Solutions proposed by libraries tend in the direction of “open access,” with libraries freely providing digitized information to its patrons. However, this form of publication has serious implications for copyright and intellectual property issues. Not to mention that open access models, unless their costs are underwritten, don’t work for university presses, which support themselves by the sale of their publications and the management and licensing of the rights to them.

What will be the place of university presses in the digital future of scholarly communication? I look to university presses to play an important role in fostering wide dissemination while protecting intellectual property, the continuity of peer review, and high quality editing. These are principles that have guided university presses in the past and in the present and will continue to guide their participation in the digital future.

A model in which university presses, libraries, university administrations, university technology resources, and faculty collaborate would seem to hold the key to the future. It is a direction that will require flexibility, creativity, rethinking of the traditional apportioning of costs and division of responsibilities, and the creation of a workable business model. Not easy to achieve to be sure, this sort of collaboration seems to me to hold particular promise for the production, publication, and dissemination of documentary editions.

