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From A University Press-To Download or Not to Download, That Is the Question

Leila W. Salisbury

University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, lsalisbury@ihl.state.ms.us

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From A University Press — To Download or Not to Download, That Is the Question



Column Editor: **Leila W. Salisbury** (Director, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, MS 39211; Phone: 601-432-6205) <lsalisbury@ihl.state.ms.us>

The shift to the purchase — or in many cases, licensing — of scholarly eBooks raises no end of questions about acquisitions philosophies, pricing, consortial sharing, single-user versus simultaneous-access models, demand driven purchasing/lending, the remaining market for print versions of these books, and the list goes on and on. After the matter of pricing, however, no issue in this landscape may be more contentious, or less understood, than the downloading of eBook content onto a patron's various devices.

In the years since university presses began signing up with vendors old and new to sell scholarly content electronically, the issue of downloads has been a source of concern, and in many cases publishers refuse to allow any patron downloads. That is, if publishers know about the downloading to begin with. Product offerings and the various features they allow develop rapidly, and vendors sometimes assume that these new packages are covered by language in an agreement a publisher might have signed years before. I think about this issue a great deal of late. I want to make sure that my press's electronic content is being considered for these new and pilot programs, included as part of the title catalog being loaded at libraries just testing out a PDA or short-term loan plan so that the books have the maximum number of opportunities for discovery (and therefore use and purchase). On the other hand, I also worry that our press's content is being offered in ways that I would not want, at least at the moment, or at prices disconnected from those we have set. So though I am deeply interested in this topic and want to engage with vendors about our electronic content, the reality is that I don't always know exactly what happens to our eBooks, and that's an uncomfortable feeling.

With these eBooks, when printing and downloads of electronic content become in-

involved, publishers begin to get very nervous. Why? It's not that we dislike change (well, perhaps many of us do, but we've also learned to accept that change is now the norm rather than the exception when it comes to scholarly communication and dissemination of content). Rather, it's that publishers see the revenue sources that sustain many university presses — particularly course adoption sales and licensing fees for material included in coursepacks, whether print or electronic — directly impacted by programs that allow for unrestricted sharing, printing, and downloading. This may seem surprising, but at an average university press (and there are more than 130 with membership in the **Association of American University Presses**), only 25-50% of revenue might come from institutional sales. Less than half of a typical press's income is derived from libraries. The rest comes from trade/general interest titles, regional publications, and, you guessed it, course adoptions.

I could devote a separate column to the issue of whether an eBook offers greater/different accessibility than a print book or article placed on reserve in the library for use in a particular course and whether that should be considered as fair use (the **ARL's** new January 2012 *Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for Academic and Research Libraries* addresses this issue from the library perspective). With the Georgia State ruling just handed down, this question just got clearer, or murkier, depending on whether you're a publisher or a librarian. For the purpose of this piece, I'll posit that publishers believe that unrestricted electronic access to content (unless licensed under a multiple-user model) and full-text downloading will almost certainly decrease library and consumer sales of a course-appropriate book. With print books, students either bought the book (admittedly it may have been purchased used) or coursepack, shared a copy among a

handful of classmates, or went without. With a library's eBook edition and with the ease of sharing (whether sanctioned or unsanctioned) of this material, there is no need for the library to purchase more than one copy of even high-circulation materials, and students have practically no incentive to purchase a book for a course if it can be downloaded for reading and printing at their leisure.

At issue is not that publishers want to suppress use of the scholarly content we publish. In fact, we want just the opposite. The mission statements of most university presses call for the widest possible dissemination of the scholarship we publish, in whatever form, print or e. What alarms publishers is lost sales and revenue. An electronic copy in a library may mean the loss of 10 or 20 print sales for a course. But multiply this 10 or 20 by the twice per year that course is taught, and then by the 20 campuses where this book is being used, and now you're talking about a substantial number of books.

Standard business guidelines for university presses suggest that 40% of a press's annual income should derive from new titles, while 60% or more of the revenue should be generated by the backlist. For many presses, these backlist sales rely heavily on the course books described above. In many ways, these books are the foundational rocks that sustain university press operations. If sales of these books decline precipitously because of eBook downloads and printing capabilities, the money to develop, edit, print, and publish the next new scholarly book may simply not be there.

No one wants this, of course, not the libraries and certainly not the publishers. As I remind myself daily, this is a moment of transition for scholarly communication, and our needs and practices are evolving. Publishers need to understand that, as one librarian recently told me, students make a lot of assumptions about electronic content. They want to download it to multiple devices because that's the way they're used to working. Conversely, libraries need to know the changing financial picture publishers face and to understand that concerns about lost sales are what motivate download and other use restrictions. The money to keep fulfilling the mission publishers are called to serve has to come from somewhere.

I wish I had an answer to this conundrum today. I can, however, at least begin with an explanation of scholarly publishers' thinking on this issue and view that as a first step to finding a solution satisfactory to all parties. Both libraries and publishers are deeply committed to high-quality content and want patrons to be using that content. So I take comfort in the fact that this is a pretty good starting place for the discussion.

Booklover from page 65

Francis, developing a kindred relationship around the subjects of DNA, RNA, and their structure and wanting to work on something interesting and not "something inert like collagen." Once they defined the elegant structure of the DNA molecule they could begin to divine how DNA made RNA made protein.

Dr. Crick's lecture was entitled "On the Genetic Code." He used his lecture to "ask certain questions about the genetic code and ask how far we can now answer them." Proteins are composed of twenty different amino acids. How is this made possible from

a molecule that only contains four individual nucleic acids? Defining the composition and size of the codon, a term defined by **Dr. Crick** as the set of nucleic acids that code for an amino acid, was essential to understanding our genetic code. He ends his lecture with the hope that "all these points will be clarified in the near future, and that the genetic code will be completely established on a sound experimental basis within a few years."

Fifty years later, the human genome has been completely sequenced and we only have more questions. Molecular biologists and geneticists continue to fill journals with experiments that solidly confirm the elegance of this genetic code. 🍄