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From A University Press-What's the Big Idea?

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From A University Press — What's the Big Idea?

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

The annual meeting of the **Association of American University Presses (AAUP)** took place in Boston in mid-June. I always look forward to this meeting, for many reasons: I'm reminded of the amazing collegiality and ingenuity of staff at presses across the country; I invariably hear tales about others' workflow or HR conundrums that make me quite happy to keep my own press's set of challenges (and also make me feel that those challenges aren't quite as big as I'd assumed them to be); and I get to spend three days outside of my usual box listening to fresh and exciting ideas that I can adapt and apply to my own institution. I always come away invigorated and grateful for this work I am privileged to do.

In the meetings following the recession, publishers have been more open in sharing the challenges and threats (some of great magnitude) to how we operate as scholarly presses, and in cases when budget cuts are

severe, *whether* we will continue to operate. I still remember the moment during the 2009 meeting when our dinner speaker, riffing off the famous line in the film *A League of Their Own*, exhorted to our beleaguered-looking group, "There is no crying in publishing!" Given the sales most of us were seeing that year, this was a needed reminder. On the whole, I'm delighted to report that as a group, university presses eschew the "misery loves company" mantra in favor of a spirit of cooperation and shared solutions, and this attitude and approach was evident at the 2013 annual meeting.

Cooperation and advocacy were big themes, as were libraries and how they work as part of our ecosystem. In his column for this issue, **Alex Holzman** will focus on the press-library relationship as it was explored at the meeting, so I'll leave that discussion to him. Strategies for outreach and institutional messaging came up time and time again. As I strongly believe, university presses can no longer afford to

hide their light under a bushel (during the meeting I heard that exact phrase from new AAUP executive director **Peter Berkery**).

So in sessions ranging from campus collaborations to institutional messaging to social media strategies to the global university press, we explored how to shine this light more openly and how to effectively engage our natural allies in scholarly communication and the offices and individuals — whether a library or a provost or a board — to whom we report.

The conference proper opened with a plenary entitled "Three Big Ideas in Publishing." Writer **Jill Lepore** talked about the role of the public intellectual and encouraged academics to engage with topics and a writing style accessible to a larger public. **Jacqueline Charlesworth**, senior counsel to the **U.S. Registrar of Copyrights**, discussed the need for copyright reform. She joked that current copyright law is perfectly suited to the needs of authors, libraries, and publishers — if you live in 1950. Many heads nodded as she discussed the severe limitations and numerous gray areas of copyright law, law which does not provide adequate guidelines for digital content and today's available technologies. What truly constitutes transformative use? How should fair use be defined in an age of digitally-enabled sharing at the click of a button? Clarification

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on these and a host of other related issues will be invaluable for both libraries and publishers, since in the absence of modern guidelines, each group has developed definitions that work well for them but perhaps work less well for their counterparts. Given all the confusion, publishers themselves have a vexed job in advising their own authors about the proper (and legal) use of illustrations and quoted material. Congress is finally making serious rumblings about taking up copyright reform, and it's high time. But **Charlesworth** warned us not to get too giddy about this prospect, as she reminded the audience that the last time copyright reform was undertaken in Congress, it took 20 years to pass new legislation.

The plenary's final speaker was **Michael Schrage**, research fellow at the MIT Sloan School's Center for Digital Business. **Schrage** spoke briefly about the monumental changes taking place in the business of publishing, and he then said, "You need to stop calling yourselves publishers." I suppose this might be the equivalent of a keynote speaker at **ALA** or **Charleston** telling the room, "Quit calling yourselves librarians. It's not working for you." A noticeable chill swept the room (also felt by **Schrage** himself, as I found out while chatting with him after the session), and many listeners tuned out (or started Tweeting) at that point.

In situations such as this, I try to ask myself: what is it about what I'm hearing that challenges my worldview? What is it about this statement that makes me uncomfortable? Through past experience, I have come to

understand that these moments are often huge opportunities for learning and reframing. Often, if something gets your hackles up, it's because there's a small grain of truth somewhere in the statement or situation that you really do not want to see. In the case of **Schrage's** statement, I was intrigued by what he was saying, perhaps in large part because it reminded me of a similar moment during a plenary session in **Charleston** several years ago. A presenter from **Highwire** said something to the effect of "publishers are good book publishers, but right now they're not good content publishers." Hearing that set off alarm bells in my head and gave me shallow breathing and a rapid pulse for the next hour, partly because it was a scary prospect (publishers needing to take on a new skill set and identity) and partly because I knew it was to a great extent true.

While I was making these connections in my head and wondering where **Schrage** was going with this argument, he went on to talk about the decline of **Kodak**, once the king of the photography companies. **Schrage** noted that **Kodak** lost sight of how people wanted to interact with photography, and that's when **Apple** essentially stole the market for pictures. This is, of course, a great simplification (and only one interpretation) of what humbled the mighty **Kodak**. But I found this to be a brilliant analogy, the root message of which I've tied to the struggle of modern publishers before. It's not that people suddenly stopped caring about or wanting pictures. The point was that consumers wanted to engage with pictures in ways that **Kodak** was not facilitating or providing. The same message might be applied to scholarly publishers. The issue is (thankfully) not that no one wants or cares about scholarly content. The

struggle for us as publishers is that we are in the process of rethinking how we engage readers and researchers. We are rediscovering where we meet them and how they want to find, read, and use what it is that we offer.

For me at least, that was the big idea. The crucial reminder that we as scholarly publishers need to be more nimble than **Kodak**, more attuned to how our books and content get used and where they get discovered and shared. Rather than making an attack on our identities, perhaps **Schrage** was making a call for us to think of ourselves in broader terms, as facilitators of knowledge, rather than organizations with only one defined product path. The types of institutional and workflow flexibility and ingenuity I believe he was advocating are certainly not easy (and they're also not cheap to develop), but we as publishers will be better and stronger for taking up the challenge.

In the end, I take heart in the fact that university presses, at our very best, are also reflections of what we publish. Scholarship is our mission and our guiding star, and scholarship is not static. It constantly changes and evolves, exchanging outmoded ideas and interpretations for ones that meet and exemplify current knowledge. In what we publish, we seek to communicate ideas that push beyond accepted discussions and break new ground. Sometimes we even give the world a glimpse of what lies ahead. We are good at doing this for the men and women we publish, and we can be good at doing this for ourselves as well. So I'll take the position that there is nothing wrong with being a publisher, and I'm proud to call myself one. The key is defining "publisher" in a broad, dynamic, and forward looking way that allows us to continually engage with those big ideas and to give them life. 🌱

From the University Presses — Consorting and Collaborating at the AAUP Meeting

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The AAUP held its annual gathering in Boston this past June, with a near-record number of folks exchanging tips, swapping stories, and just getting caught up. **Leila Salisbury** has a good summary of the atmospherics and other issues in her piece for this issue, so I'll focus on a couple of themes that kept coming up again and again.

Specifically, discussions of collaboration with other institutions within the university — primarily but not exclusively libraries — and ways university presses could collaborate and act consortially within our own community were scheduled into every time slot at the meeting.



Let's begin with the area most relevant to *Against the Grain* readers: library relations. As more presses report directly into libraries (including Temple, where I hang my hat), it's apt to at least begin a preliminary assessment of how it's going. This was precisely the subject in "University Press & Library Cohabitation and Collaboration: Challenges and Opportunities." Three of the four participants (all university press people, though librarians had plenty of chance to voice their own views in other sessions) told of their experiences when their press physically moved into the respective libraries at **Georgia**, **Arizona**, and **Purdue**.

Not surprisingly, the results are related to the way the decision to move the presses was

reached. Where there was consultation with all parties the move seemed to go more smoothly; where there was not, it was for one side like being shunted to a new foster home and for the other like taking on a boarder. Plenty of potential, but some getting used to each other required.

Still, the takeaway from this session for me was **Charles Watkinson's** account of how fully **Purdue University Press** and the **Purdue Libraries** are working together. It is perhaps not coincidental that **Charles** is both Scholarly Communications and Press Director, thereby tearing down a wall that could easily keep librarians and professional publishers apart. His division provides scholarly publishing services, from the depositing of unreviewed materials like conference proceedings, technical reports, and databases into the institutional repository

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