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# Mixing Oil and Water: Recipes for Press-Library Collaboration

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# Mixing Oil and Water: Recipes for Press-Library Collaboration

*Patrick Alexander, Director, Pennsylvania State University Press*
*James McCoy, Director, University of Iowa Press*
*Leila Salisbury, Director, University Press of Mississippi*
*Richard Brown, Director, Georgetown University Press*

Session Abstract:
Recipes for success in press library collaborations can involve dangerous and foreign cultures, environments, and materials that often don't mix together easily or regularly. This session will look at those incompatibilities and examine how a few presses have tried to mix the oil and water of publisher and library. From the perspective of three university press directors, the panel will identify the ingredients in a successful partnership that may not be as obvious to onlookers as we think they are, and whose "mixing" requires more than simply the idea of collaboration.

## Six Characteristics of Publishing Collaborations between Research Libraries and Scholarly Presses

*Richard Brown, PhD, Director, Georgetown University Press*

Abstract:
Drawing on my informal survey of press directors from the Association of American University Presses I contend that effective and sustainable publishing collaborations between research libraries and scholarly presses should be based on organizational interests and have the following characteristics: ongoing communication, clearly articulated expectations, an identified audience, financial projections, schedules, and knowing when to quit.

I have been interested in publishing collaborations between research libraries and scholarly presses for some time—though self-interest is a more appropriate characterization. Several years ago Georgetown's University Librarian, Artemis Kirk, and I decided to post two dozen Georgetown University Press monographs on the library's digital repository, Digital Georgetown. That seemed to us to be a worthy and worthwhile intersection of aims: initially the library wanted content for its repository in the field of linguistics, which is a significant field of research at the university; the press wanted to give some of our deep backlist titles renewed visibility. Further, the library wanted to generate interest in the repository itself, ramping up holdings, while the press wanted to generate potential interest in sales via a "buy" button on each title, one that led readers back to the press's website—though given the esoteric nature of these titles we did not expect significant revenue. In the context of a strong relationship between a university library and a university press, this was and remains a modest and interesting collaboration.

I am using the term interest intentionally and repeatedly at the outset—six times thus far—because I have become convinced that any meaningful collaboration between research libraries and scholarly presses must begin by holding the promise of satisfying self-interests. That is not the way we typically characterize our motivations, but recall that the linguistic root of the noun "interest" is "to concern" and also "in between." And that seems entirely appropriate.

Publishing collaborations motivated by guilt, or designed to satisfy the dean or the provost, or responding to a vague sense of community or university or moral obligation that we should climb on board and invest staff time and dollars because everyone else seems to be doing it, will very likely not result in effective, sustainable collaborations.

About a month ago, in anticipation of this panel, I informally surveyed directors of the Association of American University Presses about their collaborations with their libraries. I asked directors to tell me two things: first, what kinds of publishing collaborations worked, and why; and second, how they measured success. I received a small but reasonable number of responses, in the rest of my time I want to summarize the main themes or characteristics of what undergirds these collaborations. I will not explore specific collaborations themselves, of which there are many fascinating

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and inspiring examples, but only the framework for making those collaborations successful.

One wise press director summed it up: "Collaboration is hard," she wrote. "We do not see the world through the same lens as librarians." She is right, I think, but that does not mean research libraries and scholarly presses cannot acknowledge these different lenses and work together to put some of their aims and interests into a common focus.

Some of these characteristics that emerged from the survey represent what are simply good business practices, applicable to any kind of organization in any kind of industry. The phrase "business practices" may grate some ears in this setting, I know, but in my mind they are utterly essential for fruitful collaboration.

From the survey—again, this was informal and unscientific--I identified five primary characteristics. The first and most obvious is communication, and I mean communication at every step of the way, both written and oral. The first step here is identifying primary contacts and spokespersons at the library and at the presses, and making those individuals accountable for regular interaction and information exchange and updates. It is unfortunate to hear how rare that occurs. One press director mentioned an ambitious open access journals plan involving the library and the press initiated two years ago. There has been one meeting since that time, and no communication whatsoever in the past four months. And you can guess the likely outcome of that collaboration.

The second characteristic is related to the first: the need for both the library and the press to articulate expectations at the outset of the collaboration--and at regular intervals. That is to say, what does each party want to get out of this relationship? This is another way of articulating interests. Do our interests overlap? Or, as time passes, are we seeing those interests drift apart? Being clear about how our expectations will be met, exactly what will constitute a satisfactory outcome, is a critical component of success.

The third characteristic is identifying the audience. In making publishing decisions press committees will often ask, "Who cares?" If a press cannot answer that question, it should not be publishing that book or that journal or that data set, regardless of specific financial projections. The same should hold for library-press collaborations: being clear about intended readership. A related issue is the need to define constituencies, to ensure librarians and publishers really mean the same thing when we are talking about readers. When we refer to the "university community," for instance, who exactly do we have in mind? Scholars or students or administrators of alums? Or some of those, or all of those? The term "community" is too vague; it does not really help us when we think about who will benefit from our collaboration.

Fourth, financial projections. These are often challenging, given how libraries and presses approach accounting and budgets, but they are a fundamental ingredient of any serious publishing collaboration. We need some sort of cost projection, one that includes staff time, and, if applicable, projected revenues, and we must make those transparent and understandable to both sides. And if libraries and presses are investing money and staff, they will also need to assess and acknowledge opportunity costs: activities that each side will forego because of the collaboration. We all have limited budgets and limited (and overworked) staff, with limited hours in the day, and all activities have more costs that we often admit. These need to be recognized, made plain, and accepted as reasonable before the collaboration gets fully underway. Of course costs always change; reprojections are appropriate and necessary.

The fifth characteristic is schedules. Library-press collaborations ought to be obsessed with schedules, but the responses I received in my survey indicated that this is often not the case. In fact, and without assigning blame to one party or the other, there is typically a great deal of uncertainty about next steps. Laying out milestones—what needs to happen when, and who is responsible—is an essential starting point for any kind of collaboration. Of course schedules, like financials, can change. They must adapt. So revisiting and adjusting timelines, timelines that accommodate reality and not overly ambitious dreams, is always a part of the equation. Those are the five characteristics that emerged from my survey, but I want to add a sixth: know

when to quit. Have an exit strategy. Recognize when to shake hands, civilly, and acknowledge that the collaboration was a noble experiment, that it is just not coming together, that what we are doing is no longer in our interest. If there is no real plan and no real action, let it go and move onto other activities. Some collaborations fail, but this does not mean that they should not have been undertaken; something can always be learned. Better to cut the cord and get out of a bad relationship than to allow it to linger and fester—and maybe poison any future possibility of working together on other collaborations. Sometimes our different lenses prevent our goals from coming into focus, and we should accept that.

So on that cheery note, let me conclude by saying this: research libraries and scholarly presses have lots of good reasons to partner. There are many, many effective and sustainable collaborations in our midst and I have no doubt they will increase in the years ahead. But these collaborations must reflect our interests; they cannot be forced. As I have mentioned, they should be characterized by communication, shared expectations, an identified audience, financials, schedules, and knowing when to stop. The presence of those characteristics will not guarantee success, but in the end they will give us a better opportunity to achieve it.

*Leila Salisbury Director, University Press of Mississippi*
*Patrick Alexander, Director, Penn State University Press*

The growth in the number of collaborative projects between libraries and university presses has its roots in a number of areas, but I see one of the drivers encouraging these collaborations is the fact that both presses and libraries find themselves in real moments of institutional transformation. Libraries are redefining their physical spaces and how they help patrons discover content, and university presses are reexamining the areas in which they publish (with an eye both towards the areas of strength of their campus faculty and evolving sales markets) and the forms in which they publish content, which includes an increasing number of electronic channels and platforms. The challenges library and scholarly publisher face are essentially two sides of the same coin: the challenge of becoming technology experts as well as idea experts; the challenge of doing more (for publishers, print plus electronic; for libraries educating a campus about how to access information and research) with the same or even smaller staffs; and perhaps the most contentious challenge of all, money and adequate funding for the traditional and the newly acquired work both publishers and librarians are charged with doing. Libraries are in the process of seeing their acquisitions funds shift towards electronic resources, and ballooning serials budgets eat up the little money set aside for monographs. Publishers are similarly in the process of reimagining book budgets in an era when 400 copies or fewer of a monograph might be sold at the same time when new funds have to be dedicated to electronic conversions, storage, and distribution of ebook editions of that new monograph.

My original thought was to approach this issue of collaborative work from the perspective of our cultural differences. And there are indeed differences, which I initially defined as the dichotomies of creation vs. acquisition, a culture of no vs. a culture of yes, and the idea of restriction of content vs. the dissemination of content. I began with the idea that publishers are often the ones saying no; are the originators of content; and are the restrictors of how that content is used through DRM and pricing mechanisms. Both economic and technology changes make this a challenging and uncertain time for most university presses. Institutional support is often decreasing at the same time that sales of specialized monographs shrink further. Recouping overhead with these much smaller sales is very difficult, especially once new costs for file conversions for e-books and digital storage and distribution of book files is factored into the mix. Publishing simultaneous print and paper editions, while the goal of many publishers, does not mean there are fewer costs, and in fact there are greater costs in increased investment in digital formatting and in often in greatly increased permissions fees from third party rightholders.

While the cultural differences between library and scholarly publisher do exist, after talking with five different librarians of varying backgrounds and positions, I became convinced that the issues of

our differences were much less important than the fact that both libraries and university presses both very much need to take better advantage of one another's resources and strengths. These librarians talked to me, each from their own perspective, about how both publisher and library are part of the same chain of scholarly communication. Doris Kammradt, who has worked as a selector in the humanities for 15 years with the Wellesley, Trinity, and Connecticut College library consortium, described the author, publisher, and library as the parts of a three ring circus. I liked this analogy for a number of reasons (one of which is that if we all should be having fun doing what we do). This image of the three ring circus reinforces that we are all part of the process of both creation and selection, simply each in our own way. When I commented to the librarians at the Trinity consortium that it was perhaps the unique job of the publisher to be selective in what presses acquire and shape for publication, they responded that libraries, too, must be selective in acquisitions, building a collection that works for their particular campus population. They added that as they select, they also rely on the selectivity of UPs to vet material and exercise editorial quality control, to only accept the very best and freshest ideas and research for publication; they also rely heavily on publisher reputation as they select. Mary Beth Thompson of the University of Kentucky Libraries reiterated this point about selectivity, and went further to add that libraries, like publishers, are becoming more discriminating about content selectivity (as information proliferates online) as a way to guide patrons to the material with the most intellectual value. Doris Kammaradt and her colleague Lorraine Huddy went on to say the both libraries and publishers are the middle passage and the connectors between scholars and content, and libraries feed the scholarly cycle on both ends through helping scholars discover content and then introducing newly published content back to the authors for further new research. Mike Keller of the Stanford libraries reiterated this notion, describing both publisher and library as "intermediaries in the academic process."

These days, what increasingly gets both publisher and library to the "yes" of acquiring content is patron/researcher discovery through library patron driven purchasing programs. One of the crucial areas of missed opportunity in the library/university press relationship is the sharing of user and market data. Mary Beth Thompson noted that libraries get a great deal of user feedback and requests for content. They are literally the ones helping patrons navigate content platforms (and can therefore help assess their usability), and their circulation statistics could serve as invaluable guides to growing academic areas of research interest. This type of data could easily help publishers know which of their fields of publication to grow or to prune according to trends in user demand for scholarship. Mike Keller agreed that library subject specialists have valuable knowledge that publishers are not currently using. David Seaman, an associate librarian for information management at the Dartmouth libraries, talked about this type of user information as critical for publishers to know. He said that libraries know a great deal about markets and are essentially "a lab, a market testing operation" in a setting where there are a wide variety of products by many publishers being used side by side. The libraries know the consumers, and they can assess how easy content is to access. Publishers are today separated from their own users—to an alarming degree—as content travels through aggregator and other resale channels; this presents a great challenge for successful marketing and publisher branding. Scholarly publishers talk a great deal about metadata and discoverability, and right in our own libraries we have experts in both these areas who can help publishers assess their own programs and offerings—as well as commenting on the accessibility and navigability of the publisher's material (as well as the content and platforms offered by other publishers). Lorraine Huddy reiterated the library's expertise in understanding user expectations in relation to technology, especially in the areas of DRM and content for multiple platforms and mobile devices. As libraries increasingly shift to the acquisition of electronic content, publishers cannot afford to ignore any of these issues.

As we discussed electronic content, David Seaman targeted another critical area in which there can be greater collaboration and sharing of expertise between publisher and library: content and file formatting. He argues that for users, content is more

important than the brand or publisher, and it is not enough to merely discover content. He notes that patrons increasingly expect content to be malleable, to be able to be broken apart and reassembled in different ways, and to have the capability of having Reusability is key for the long term relevance of scholarly content, and Seaman say that the best long term use and storage solutions for this content is to produce electronic files in the most format neutral way possible for maximum malleability and archivability. He says that too many publishers today still rely on the static PDF, and he feels that XML and ePub files are currently the best way to ensure both maximum content reusability. Essentially, these types of file formats allow for the construction of a scholarship on multiple platforms and in a number of iterations. Seaman posits that librarians often have much greater technical expertise in these types of file formatting and conversions, and collaborations in the area of developing new electronic workflows for book content would be a boon for publishers. He says, "with technology, libraries can essentially be free R&D centers for electronic projects." Mike Keller also argued that mobile devices will become the norm for certain types of information gathering and that cross platform performance will become a huge issue as books become more interactive.

One additional area for improved interaction and collaboration between libraries and university presses is the act of publishing itself. Charles Watkinson of the Purdue University Press and libraries recently authored an IMLS supported program report that found that in 2010, 80% of ARL libraries, 30% of Oberlin Group libraries, and 46% of University Library Group libraries reported either delivering or planning to deliver publishing services. However, librarians considered the biggest challenge to these programs to be the fact that these programs "lacked a dedicated champion for publishing services." This seems like a natural role for university presses to fill, as there is not necessarily competition between the types of material that presses and libraries will be interested in publishing, and they can complement one another nicely. So university presses can help provide leadership and consultation for these programs, and this would serve as a valuable show of both direct service and relevance to their campuses. Such program leadership and consultation not only affirms a university press as an integrated partner in the scholarly work of its home institution, but it puts the press in the position of being a problem solver instead of a budget drain.

I'll end with a thought shared by Mike Keller. He noted that "the world is changing rapidly enough that we can't avoid the challenge of being innovative within our own organizations. There are too many opportunities for improvement within the system of a networked environment, and we can't keep doing things as we've always done them." Many university presses are very good book publishers, but in this age of e-books and electronic content, the challenge is for university presses to become very good content publishers as well. And it is here that the libraries can become an integral part of that transformative process, through their knowledge of users, platform usability and market competition, and the IT issues of file formatting, conversions, and archivability. Our institutional cultures may be different, but if libraries and presses do not put a priority on information sharing and the sharing of program expertise, then we shortchange both our home institutions and the faculty and students we are by our very natures called to serve.