Against the Grain

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From the University Presses-Celebrating the First Annual University Press Week

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From the University Presses — Celebrating the First Annual University Press Week

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Throughout 2012, the Association of American University Presses has been celebrating its 75th anniversary. As librarians and publishers gather in Charleston this November, we’re preparing the capstone of our year with the first annual University Press Week (November 11-17). The occasion calls for an examination of just what we celebrate in AAUP and “University Presses” — and why we invite our librarian colleagues to celebrate these things with us.

In 1937, more than 20 university press publishers gathered together in New York City and agreed to a new association’s constitution. The AAUP today has grown to more than 130 members while serving its founding mission of cooperation and service to the non-profit scholarly publishing community.

That mission pre-dates the formal foundation of the association however — university press publishers from all around the country had been meeting annually since the early 1920s. The first broadly collaborative venture, a joint catalog, was produced in 1928. Further cooperative projects followed through the early thirties, ranging from shared mailing lists to foreign trade opportunities to discussions of relations with libraries. Nice to know we’ve been engaging each other for over seventy-five years!

Some resisted formalizing this cooperative group, but by 1937 factors began to weigh in favor of creating an association. The work required by joint projects had become such that a rotating formal executive secretary position or presidency was the most agreeable solution to sharing the administrative burden. (The AAUP Central Office, with a professional staff, was not established until 1959.) Also, a commercial group had recently begun advertising book distribution and sales services as the “United University Presses” group. This, more than any other factor, may have tipped the scales for the more reluctant publishers in the room. If they were wary of the commitments to commonality rather than independence signaled by formalizing their association, they were even more concerned to protect the common spirit implied by the university press name. (Once the AAUP formed, the offending company changed its name to “University Books, Inc.” and was seldom mentioned again in surviving AAUP records.)

Though our group was in this respect founded to protect the name of “university presses,” the full formal name of AAUP — the Association of American University Presses — posed a bit of a conundrum from early on. Was “American” necessary? Only U.S. and Canadian publishers constituted the original founding group, but the U.S. offices of Oxford University Press had long been involved in the annual get-togethers and various collaborative projects. Would Oxford, and other international universities, be welcome in the American University Press group? Scholarly societies, think tanks, and museums began to launch or expand publishing operations with the same mission and on broadly similar models to those of the members of AAUP. What of these publishers who were not university affiliated?

Those questions have been answered over the years. The U.S. branches of Oxford and Cambridge University Presses joined AAUP as full members in 1950; and AAUP’s international members can be found in eight countries around the world. Twenty AAUP members are not affiliated with degree-granting institutions, from independent publishers such as Beacon Press and Island Press to scholarly societies such as the Modern Language Association and the American Historical Association. New library-based publishing operations share the underlying mission but not the label of university presses.

Proposals to change the association’s name to better reflect its membership have been floated regularly almost since day one. Even the word “Presses” can seem like a bit of a misnomer today — the publishing activities of AAUP members are now more likely to rest on bits and bytes than ink and type!

But the proposals never get far. At base, “American university press” turns out to be useful shorthand for a certain model of publishing — not model in the sense of business model, but a specific ideal for mission-driven scholarly publishing. In the university context, Daniel Coit Gilman famously stated this ideal as: “It is one of the noblest duties of a university to advance knowledge, and to diffuse it not merely among those who can attend the daily lectures — but far and wide.” A more universal version could well be adopted by any member of AAUP as a statement of purpose: “to advance knowledge far and wide.” The membership eligibility guidelines of the AAUP make clear what are considered the baseline requirements for fulfilling such a purpose: a member must be not-for-profit, must be professionally managed, and agreed to a new association’s constitution.

The American university press model quickly won high marks. Indeed, Peter Dougherty, AAUP President and director of the Princeton University Press, tells the story of a Princeton University president’s visit to India in the 1960s: the official was politely greeted and promptly queried as to whether Princeton University was perhaps affiliated with the Princeton University Press!

While many AAUP members have developed disciplinary specialties distinct from those of their home institutions, presses also focus on developing programs complementary with institutions’ core strengths. If one of the values of an AAUP member is the ability to carry the flag of their university or organization “far and wide,” then it is particularly valuable that the press can help trumpet an institution’s own prestige in economics, analytic philosophy, musicology, or Mesoamerican archaeology.

Many AAUP publishers, particularly those based at public universities and historical societies, look to advance knowledge not just “far and wide” but “near and deep.” Such presses have a strong commitment to publishing works of regional significance and supporting regional voices in a way that no commercial or distant publisher is likely to do. Those readers who have gathered in Charleston might look to the most recent publications of the University of South Carolina Press for a striking example of this commitment: you’ll find a book on conservation in the Lowcountry, an encyclopedic guide to the Revolutionary War in SC, an anthology of the gritty side of Southern literature, and a photographic exploration of Charleston’s private gardens, among many other such titles.

Both the regional and national constituencies of AAUP members were highlighted in continued on page 70
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University Press Week will carry the lesson of Missouri into all of our communities. The focus of the 2012 celebration is press’s role in “contributing to an informed society.” For that is the true work an AAUP member press undertakes for all its constituents, local, national, and international — the books, journals, reference works, apps, and scholarly networks of these publishers offer reliable information, knowledge, and lasting availability through a variety of formats. AAUP’s “Books for Understanding” program, listing the highest-quality books across a spectrum of contemporary issues, demonstrates what the American university press means for an educated citizenry, and the University Press Week Fine Print (“not just print!”) online gallery highlights what it has meant for disciplines and communities for more than a century.

Creating an informed society is certainly impossible without the work of librarians, and so our talks with each other continue and intensify. Libraries and university presses are the most natural of partners, and so we are especially pleased to invite our colleagues and friends at Charleston and throughout the library world to celebrate University Press Week and, as you’ll read elsewhere in this issue, to help us look forward to the next 75 years of collaboration in service to the advancement of knowledge. www.universitypressweek.org

Acquisitions: Current Successes and Future Challenges

By Joe Badics (Acquisitions Librarian, Bruce T. Halle Library, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI 48197; Phone: 734-487-0020 x.2053)

One of the hot topics at recent conferences, including the 2010 Charleston Conference, has been Patron-Driven Acquisitions, or “PDA.” It was the topic of two publications in 2011: Patron-Driven Acquisitions: History and Best Practices, edited by David A. Swords, and Patron-Driven Acquisitions: Current Successes and Future Directions, edited by Judith M. Nixon, Robert S. Freeman, and Suzanne M. Ward.

As the Nixon set points out, “PDA” has already been occurring. Virtually all libraries have used patron input to build their collections; and many libraries, including ours, have been purchasing interlibrary loan requests rather than borrowing when appropriate to the collection. In our case we have been purchasing paper copies and rush order and process them. NetLibrary offered the “PDA” of eBooks many years ago.

Why the sudden attention to patron-driven acquisitions (again)? Tighter (if not decreasing) acquisition budgets, the cost of storing volumes, declining print circulation, pressure to repurpose library space, and continuous expansion and embracing of electronic resources by the public are just some of the reasons libraries are migrating to eBooks. The pendulum has been swinging away from just-in-case collection development to favor just-in-time purchasing.

eBooks are not new to our library. We have participated in Michigan state-wide purchases of NetLibrary eBook packages and purchased selected Springer eBook backfiles. Our computer science selector has been managing a small subset of computer books in “Safari.” Our Department of Information Technology has graciously been paying for campus access to “Books 24x7,” for which we have added a phrase, “DDA Title,” in a 590 note: the library can use the catalog as well as for weekly download of eBooks that matched our profile from 2010 to date (2009 and older was deemed already out of date for many subjects). The ISBNs from our current catalog were matched against the ebrary database. Only eBooks that we did not already own in print or electronic were added to our catalog.

The initial ebrary “PDA” catalog records were reviewed by our cataloging librarian. Our systems librarian arranged for the backfile of 2010 to-date eBook records to be added to the catalog as well as for weekly download of new “PDA” records. It was decided to add the phrase, “DDA Title,” in a 590 note: the librarians and staff can identify the ebrary titles from other eBooks in our catalog. (YBP calls their system “demand-drive acquisitions” hence the “DDA”).

We created a deposit account with YBP to pay for the orders for the pilot instead of penalizing any subject fund; thus, assuring those selectors who have refused to select any eBooks in their subjects.

Due to extenuating circumstances (ahem: a flood), we finally got the “PDA” new and backfiles of older records started in the beginning of May 2012. We did a silent rollout: we did not announce to the public that there were approximately 10,000 new eBooks available.

During the first three months (May-July 2012) 77 books generated STLs and five received enough STLs to be ultimately purchased. Of the...