Against the Grain

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From A University Press-Keeping Presses Healthy

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November 11-17, 2012 will be the inaugural University Press Week, as sponsored by the Association of American University Presses (AAUP). This week will also serve as a culminating event in the celebrations of the 75th anniversary of the AAUP, the professional association to which nearly all peer-reviewing university presses in this country belong.

This anniversary moment is perhaps a good time to look at where university presses have collectively come and where they are headed in the next 75 years. AAUP board president Peter Dougherty (Princeton University Press) notes, “While our 75th anniversary gives us the opportunity to reflect on our celebrated past, it also provides us a setting to frame the ways in which we will move forward as an innovative publishing force intent on reaching more readers in more corners of the world than ever before.” At first it appeared that the AAUP would have to reconsider the nature of its organization and practices make sense in a world where presses are being forced outside our specialized world see publishing as an elite, aging, and out-of-date business shrouded in mysterious traditions. In an age where administrators are forced to make increasingly difficult decisions about what gets funded and what doesn’t, being misunderstood — and especially being seen as behind the times and resistant to change — is hazardous.

This hesitancy to tout our own accomplishments and worth likely has many origins, among them: we truly believe that our work speaks for itself; that bragging is unseemly; and (perhaps most unfortunately) that we know what we’re doing and we don’t need administrators’ unhelpful meddling. I do wonder, however, if there isn’t another important reason some university press administrators want to hide when they should be out hosting an educational seminar for faculty: publishing and scholarly communication are changing so rapidly that we don’t know what we’re doing 100% of the time. We’re forced to experiment with different business models, content delivery formats, and marketing tactics. What’s more disconcerting, some of these experiments may not work, and who wants to admit that to a provost or library dean? But as Kathryn Schultz argues in her fascinating book Being Wrong, using error and the knowledge it brings to make better subsequent decisions makes us smarter and stronger — both as individuals and organizations. Situations and patterns of student and faculty behavior change all the time. Given this environment, not experimenting isn’t a choice. On a recent conference call with a consultant and a campus IT manager, the consultant made the following two statements in rapid succession: “You [university presses] are overadapted to a vanishing ecological niche” and “You are attached to an unworkable business model.” After a long moment of silence, the librarian and I began to laugh and said, “Yeah, you’re probably right....” While the consultant’s assessment and predictions were fairly dire and I would argue (at least hope) that he had overstated the case a bit, what he wanted to emphasize was that publishers, libraries, and scholarly societies cannot go it alone; we have to work together to solve our collective problems. We in scholarly communications, broadly defined, find ourselves in a place — the campus, the world of ideas — where our output and activities have irrevocably knit us together, and the task now is to acknowledge that the work of our separate groups must now join in support of these common goals.

As the traditional boundaries of our world dissolve, so our connections strengthen.” Faran says. So in the next 75 years of our collective work, we as university presses should operate from the perspective that the processes of outward communication and learning from our constituents must drive our internal vision for our work as scholarly publishers. Not that we should be dictated to, for we have a valuable and perspective of our own within this ecosystem, but we also cannot exist independently of the world we work to serve. We are not the aging, lumbering dinosaurs of scholarly communication that the media, especially as it covered the Missouri situation, frequently paints presses to be.

But neither are we immune from the natural evolution of our world. Electronic content in all its varied forms — databases, monograph aggregations, books by the chapter purchased or loaned — is here to stay and must be made available alongside print books. We must stop

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the aftermath of the spring 2012 closure or reformulation (since reversed) of the University of Missouri Press. Protests came not just from scholars and press authors all over the country, but also from Missouri readers, writers, faculty, alumni, and leaders. It became exceptionally clear that a Press is an integral part of a university’s community and, more, can help to open up that community in irreplaceable ways.

University Press Week will carry the lesson of Missouri into all of our communities. The focus of the 2012 celebration is presses’ 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

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fearing being wrong at the cost of the valuable knowledge we gain from experimenting with what books we choose to publish and how we publish them. University presses can and should be a lynchpin in the new system of scholarly communication. It is up to us, however, to understand what it is that we do that works and how we add value, and conversely, which of our activities need to be reimagined for a digital age. This can best be done through considered experimentation, whether with electronic workflows that make our content more flexible (in both its putting together and taking apart) or with enhanced eBooks that enrich both the user’s knowledge and experience. So here’s to the next 75 years, AAUP. May they unfold in an environment of reimagining, experimentation, and purposeful collaboration that will make university presses matter, keep us relevant, and make us thrive.

Biz of Acq — eBook PDA at Eastern Michigan University

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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 record and link for each title in our catalog.

With the exception of “Safari,” our purchases have been for sets of books.

In 2011 we expanded our selection options in YBP’s Gobi book ordering system to allow our selectors to purchase individual electronic books instead of paper format when we signed an agreement with ebrary. Since we already had a contract with NetLibrary for earlier purchases, selectors could also opt for NetLibrary eBooks when available (now called EBSCOhost). Several selectors immediately embraced electronic over print in the expected subjects of business, science, and computer science. Our business collection has especially migrated to electronic as our College of Business is located downtown and not on the main campus where the library is. The rest of selectors have chosen electronic over print in their areas sporadically to never.

After hearing and reading about the various “PDA” eBook selection programs, we decided to launch a pilot project by expanding our existing pacts with YBP and ebrary. ebrary’s short-term loan (STL) system allows our patron to use the eBook for free until a charge is triggered by 1) using the resource for more than ten minutes, 2) viewing ten or more pages (not counting table-of-contents or indices), or 3) copying pages. Once triggered, a STL generally costs 10-15% of the eBook price and allows unfettered access to the book for 24 hours without generating another STL. We decided to pay for three STLs with the fourth event generating a purchase.

Our current approval/slip plan with YBP was reviewed. The profile was retained with some exceptions: for instance we excluded publishers that do not allow any short-term loans (one event automatically triggers a purchase). We also excluded textbooks, cookbooks, conference proceedings, dictionaries, and books classified by YBP at a professional level. We also capped the price for an eBook at $200.

We decided to add records for all ebrary 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, “DAA 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 “DAA”).

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 exterminating 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

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