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PB: Everyone needs to acknowledge that extreme positions aren’t helpful. There’s a great deal more nuance than is sometimes acknowledged. The university press agenda isn’t fully aligned with commercial publishers. What differentiates us from them — our mission to disseminate scholarship as widely as we can — can align us with libraries.

AH: How can the AAUP work to repair the gaps between libraries and presses?

PB: First, we need to talk with each other. On the association level, I’ve met recently with the new Executive Director of the ARL, Elliott Shore, and with AAU chief John Vaughan. Our dialogue with them and with other associations, whether publisher, library, or otherwise, must become a regular thing. In addition, AAUP can try to facilitate more conversation among the various constituencies in scholarly publishing. The more we talk the more we can see nuance in each other’s positions and the more we can recognize that we’re in this together.

AH: Individual libraries and presses have various formal and informal relationships on different campuses. Some presses report to libraries. Do you feel any particular model for a press-library relationship stands out from the rest?

PB: No one size fits all. As the Ithaka report noted several years ago, there’s no single model for organizing scholarly publishing at a given university. Currently, about 20% of presses report into the library. Many believe it’s positive and constructive, some report that historical tensions do rear their heads and can create a struggle. The really important thing is to establish the comparative strengths of each unit and analyze how they can be leveraged to better disseminate scholarship. In most cases, presses can reach broader audiences than can libraries alone.

AH: How should library publishing programs and university press publishing differ?

PB: A provost might ask, “Why do we have two different publishing programs?” There’s little scale to begin with at most university presses, so when you distribute publishing activity among several parts of the university, it just makes achieving scale that much harder. I don’t know enough yet to say what it is libraries are publishing, so I can’t really offer any further thought on this right now.

AH: Let’s move to some specific issues. What are your thoughts on open access?

PB: First, it isn’t always clear what people mean when they say open access. There are a wide variety of flavors, from varying methods of cost recovery for both author and publisher to embargoes on new materials to differences in copyright restrictions. So when any individuals begin to talk about open access, exactly what they mean isn’t clear. And if everyone is reduced to being for it or against it, all those necessary distinctions get lost in the rhetoric. There’s much common ground among university presses and the other constituents in the university. We need to keep the ideology out of our conversations and focus on the common goal of disseminating scholarship as widely as possible while noting the financial constraints on all the parties involved — publishers, librarians, faculty, students.

AH: Any opinions on the free rider issue in university press publishing?

PB: I know that this problem — which is that those universities sponsoring presses are absorbing costs those colleges and universities without presses do not bear — is beginning to show up on the radar of administrators and librarians. AAUP would be interested in any initiatives that address the question and look forward to participating in conversations within the broader academic community to resolve it in a way that allows the community to discuss fairer ways to share and perhaps even reduce some of the costs of scholarly communication.

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