Library and University Press Publishing: Then and Now

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Library Publishing and University Press Publishing: Then and Now

by Bob Nardini (Vice President, Product Development, Ingram Library Services) <bob.nardini@ingramcontent.com>

“Everything changed in the fall of 2008,” writes John Hussey to open the first of nine articles in this issue of Against the Grain devoted to the intersection of publishing by academic libraries and by university presses. John, now my Ingram colleague but who was then at the University Press of Kentucky, relates how the economic crash made a ruin of Kentucky’s plans for the publishing season. At the same time, the crisis forced the Press to analyze “every facet of the business” to survive in a harsher financial climate. One thing that eventually changed at Kentucky was that the Press and the library were merged organizationally and these two campus units who until then had had little to do with one another “were now sharing office spaces,” as John puts it in “Academic Publishing is Not in Crisis — It’s Just Changing.”

That was the same year, 2008, when Against the Grain commissioned an earlier special issue on this same topic (December 2008-January 2009). Patrick Alexander, then and now at the Penn State University Press, is a special issue contributor then and now as well. “Then,” Patrick described the assets university presses might bring to a joint enterprise between organizations so culturally different. He confessed to having “no secret recipe” for success in these unions, which were in the early stages of taking shape at places like the University of California, New York University, Cornell, Duke, and North Carolina. Six years later, Patrick finds that best practices “continue to be in relatively short supply” and that cultural differences are as strong as ever. But he suggests that libraries and presses might evolve to complement one another, invoking in his suggestion the biologist E.O. Wilson. Read about it and even watch an E.O. Wilson video in, “The Ant, the University Press, and the Librarian: Reflections on the Evolution of Scholarly Communication.”

Maria Bonn once referred to those early projects from 2008 as the “usual suspects,” pioneers who often found themselves drafted for panels as spokespersons for the young

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Happy 2015! Lots of news to report so far! Where to begin?

McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers’ founder Robert Franklin announced that he has passed the job and title of President to the awesomely deserving Rhonda Herman. Franklin will assume the new title of Founder and Editor-in-Chief. Founded in 1979, McFarland is an independent publisher of academic and nonfiction books. I remember reading about Franklin in the Wall Street Journal many years ago — it’s a great article. “Publishing: Niche Publisher Prosperms — Without Grishams or Kings,” by Eleena de Lisser, Wall Street Journal, eastern edition, 12 March 1998, B1. Located in the beautiful mountain town of Jefferson, North Carolina, the publisher offers 5,100 books in print, offers nearly 3,000 eBooks through online booksellers, operates its own printing facility, and employs 53 people. Rhonda Herman joined the company in 1982 as Business Manager. She was promoted to Vice President in 1991 and to Executive Vice President in 2004. While she has worked at various times in her McFarland career in every corner of the operations,

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Georgia isn’t alone in having located a new collaborative venture inside library walls. In “From University Press to the University’s Press: Building a One-Stop Resource for Scholarly Publishing,” Gary Dunham and Carolyn Walters, of Indiana University, record how IU’s Office of Scholarly Publishing was created in 2012 to move “content dissemination on campus from the university press to the university itself.” One highly visible outcome from the merged organization has been a “Scholars Commons,” housed in the library, where publishing consultation services are offered by staff from the library, the press, IT, and other campus groups, and where attendance at panels and workshops about book proposals, book contracts, and publishing a first book have forced the OSP, in effect today the “University’s press,” to find larger rooms for these oversubscribed events.

What if there is no local university press? That’s the case at Oregon’s Pacific University, whose Isaac Gilman believes that libraries of all kinds need to consider making publishing a core service, even to the point of prioritizing it over “legacy services.” Isaac, himself the Publishing Services Librarian at Pacific, describes in some detail the philosophical as well as practical barriers publishing libraries will need to overcome, in addition to the skepticism they will face from both within their own profession and from without. “Adjunct No More: Promoting Scholarly Publishing as a Core Service of Academic Libraries” presents Isaac’s case.

“How did we get into this mess?” asks Kevin S. Hawkins, of the University of North Texas, referring to today’s “dysfunctional” scholarly publishing system where library budgets and the cost of scholarly and scientific works so often head in different directions. Kevin doesn’t see “small-scale collaborations” between libraries and presses as the answer. Instead, in “How We Pay for Publishing,” he argues the need to “reimagine” an entirely new system for production of and access to scholarship.

Kevin isn’t alone in believing the current system is broken. Wait till you read Paul Royster, of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Paul, in “A Library Publishing Manifesto,” explains exactly why he thinks library publishing is needed to atone for the “sins” of commercial publishers and what he counts as the failings of university presses. If readers find his contribution “overly rhetorical” or “hyperbolic,” as he admits they might, they’ll be clear on where Paul stands. They’ll also find as vigorous an argument for the value of library publishing as they’re likely to encounter anywhere, as well as some practical advice for library publishers, all of it based in part upon what Paul has learned directing Zea Books, Nebraska’s own program.

Last spring I heard Paul deliver a version of his article at the Library Publishing Forum, a meeting mentioned by several contributors. Library publishers and university press publishers were side-by-side for the first time at a national meeting like this one, and when they met in Kansas City there was an extraordinary level of energy. Sometimes it was energy over what libraries and university presses could do together. Sometimes it was energy over what libraries should do on their own. Sometimes the mood was friendly. Sometimes it was not. If there was a consensus at all, it was that everyone experienced a degree of creative tension that’s rare at any conference.

This issue captures some of that same energy, and some of that same tension. Libraries and university presses are different but complementary. Libraries and university presses can work together to reinvent scholarship. Libraries should go it alone. Scholarship belongs to the university, not to the university press. University presses are essential and will respond to any challenge. The whole thing is broken; let’s start over. Readers of Against the Grain will find all these points of view here.

“What changed?” John Hussey wrote to open things up, and in many ways it has. Organizationally, more libraries and university presses face mandates to work together. Fiscally, nothing has been the same since the crash. Some of those same “usual suspects” from 2008 are still with us, but this issue wasn’t intended to check up on them. Then and now, what hasn’t changed is that we are still not sure how to answer this question: What’s the best relationship between library publishing and university press publishing? Is there an answer? Read the issue, get a taste of our contributors’ energy, and enjoy the discussion they offer to the Against the Grain community.