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Duke University Press Out of Print Survey

by **Thomas Fenske** (Duke University Press)

Ed note: Sometimes it seems like publishers don't care about out of print materials and that they are unconcerned about li-

*braries out there trying to get copies of books which are reported OP, OSI, etc. We have talked about it repeatedly in ATG. But recently, the Duke University Press did a survey of this phenomenon and revealed some interesting data. Here it is. I would like to thank **David Cohen**, Dean of Libraries at the College of Charleston, very much for calling this survey to *Against the Grain's* attention. Thanks, David! — KS*

Duke University Press, like all publishers, must occasionally deal with the problem of declaring books out of print. Ideally, both for the Press and for our authors, we would love to keep all our titles in print, but practical considerations do arise, and it is a necessary reality to regularly declare books out of print.

In the last couple of years we had managed to put off some of these decisions and the situation began to get especially bad from a warehousing and order processing standpoint. We felt that the two primary problems we faced were slow sales and a low stock status. Slow sales are a problem because our warehouse space is very limited; we felt a need to move out the remaining stock of books that were unfortunately no longer selling. On the low stock side, if we had zero stock and still received orders for a book that had not been reprinted, our order entry staff was having a difficult time dealing with unwanted back orders. A book needs to be listed as 'out of print' on our fulfillment system to automatically prohibit back orders to that title. There now were too many titles involved for them to simply remember which titles to manually flag.

We formed a committee to examine our present policy and formulate new policies and procedures. As part of that process, we decided to send a survey to other University Presses, asking specific questions relating to their own procedures for dealing with this problem. To save time, we circulated this survey to a number of Presses via email on the Internet.

The responses are offered below. As was reported to the committee, the answers are the same, only different. By the way, our committee's work is still unfinished, but we now have a much better understanding of the solutions available to us.

Replies were received from:

University of Toronto Press, Bill Harnum
University Press of Florida, Jim Denton, Mktg Mgr.
University of Iowa Press, Paul Zimmer
University of Texas Press, Dave Cohen, Mktg. Mgr.
Penn State Univ. Press, Sandy Thatcher, Director

Univ Press of New England, Thomas Johnson, Assoc. Dir.
UNC Press, Judy Bergman, Business Manager
University of South Carolina Press, Robin Sumner
University of Minnesota Press, Lisa Freeman, Director

Question 1: *Is there a minimum length of time for a scholarly book to remain in print at your press? Does this differ for books in different fields? For trade books?*

Toronto: Try to keep scholarly books in print 5 years. Trade books can be declared OP at any time.

Florida: None.

Iowa: Not specifically, but try to work through a title in 3 to 5 years.

Texas: 3 years

Penn St: 3 years guaranteed in author contract, but rarely consider it before 5 years.

NE: 3 years is our minimum life, although if a book goes out of stock at the end of 2-2.5 years and the rate of sale has slowed considerably we might not reprint. Our OP decision is certainly affected by our perception of a book's shelf life.

UNC: No formal or contractual time period, but usually not before 3 years. We have done them (OPs) in less than a year — usually a cloth edition replaced by a paper.

SC: We normally print a 5-year supply on scholarly books; for 3 years on trade books.

Minnesota: No. Varies on a book-by-book basis. By and large, we wouldn't put a book out of print unless it were at least five years old. and in practice we rarely put something OP that isn't at least ten years old. After that, we're pretty ruthless unless it sells or it's a "classic." We routinely put cloth editions of books available in paperback out of print without blinking an eye and have reduced the hardcover runs on our split editions in order to ensure that we *do* go out of print of the hardback within three years (part of a coordinated effort to reduce inventory value overall).

Question 2: *Does your press have a stated policy on out-of-print books? If so, please describe briefly.*

All presses except for UNC said No. UNC said Yes but did not give any more data.

Question 3: *What is the process for declaring a book out-of-print? (reports, forms, procedures, letters, etc.)*

Toronto: When sales drop below 20 copies per year, or stock is exhausted and no reprint is considered, book will be declared O/P at the end of that fiscal year.

Florida: Monitor titles with no inventory value and declining sales, or a sales history that shows excess stock remaining.

Iowa: When inventory levels drop below 50/60 copies, notify author and offer to sell at discount (not specified), then remove title from the list.

Texas: Recommendation of Marketing Manager, followed

by approval of the Editorial Council.

Penn St: After slow sales have been determined, attempt is made to reduce stock through disciplinary sales, remaindering, and donating copies free to departments or foreign libraries (through already established means).

NE: Initially marketing reviews sales and stock levels to determine if we should reprint or let go OP. A Low Stock Report with publishing history is circulated to the appropriate editor, financial officer, and the director for their opinions. If we decide to let a title go OP the author is notified by the CFO; once this book is actually out of stock we may send to UMI if appropriate. If an author requests that publication rights be reverted, the CFO writes the letter conveying these rights.

UNC: Use a combination of reports, internal forms and letters, as outlined in answers to other questions.

SC: We haven't had that many books go OP, but we run a notice in *PW*.

Minnesota: Inventory and sales are evaluated periodically by the marketing director and director; books targeted to go out of print are reviewed with appropriate acquisitions editor; authors are notified and given the opportunity to purchase remaining inventory at cost; changes are made to appropriate databases (Books in Print). Periodic remaindering, damaged book sales, a student sale (\$5 per book of damaged books in an as-is condition once a year nets us a couple thousand dollars), and white sales take care of the physical inventory.

Question 4: *When do you determine when a book should go OP? Do you have a system for reviewing inactive or barely active titles? How do you determine barely active?*

Toronto: Review inactive titles once per year—or—when warehouse manager reminds Marketing that 'things are a bit out of hand.' Barely active titles are defined as titles selling less than 10 books per year.

Florida: Either out of stock with no intent to reprint, no inventory value (five year write down) or excess stock condition (sales of less than \$150/year).

Iowa: Review inventory levels monthly. At least once a year review performance and determine candidates for remaindering and declaring OP.

Texas: When there is less than a year's inventory at the current rate of sale.

Penn St: Usually determined by slow sales history over previous 3 years (less than 25 copies sold per year), but there are exceptions.

NE: Our computer system (Cats Pajamas) generates a low activity report which is reviewed once a month. The Marketing Director will initiate the low stock review as appropriate. Occasionally this process is accelerated when for example we decide it is time to remainder stock of a large number of titles.

UNC: Slow sales (very subjective). Some authors we keep longer if there is a second book coming, or for some other sensitive reason. Cats system gives us a slow report, marketing looks at it, circulates a form with recommended reprint or to go OP or OP/OS (OP when out of stock). Single digit sales, less than 50 copies, etc. Another time OP is done at *BIP* or catalog design time, when general (many) OP decisions are made.

SC: We review all books on their 5th anniversary and decide what to do if we have lots of stock left—whether to remainder or not.

Minnesota: If sales fall below a certain level and we cannot afford to reprint. Inventory control catches some of the slower moving titles, but we don't generally look at anything that isn't at least five years old. Our strategy has been to shorten our print runs in order to reduce inventory so that we don't have too many of these kinds of books.

Question 5: *Do you inform authors before books go OP?*

Toronto: Yes, if time allows. Also send last 5 copies of a book to the author free of charge with a letter of appreciation.

Florida: In the event the stock is almost exhausted, the author is given a chance to purchase some or all of the remaining stock. If it is a case of excess stock, the author receives a different letter about 'warehouse pressures' requiring a reduction of stock.

Iowa: Yes.

Texas: Yes, when the OP determination is approved.

Penn St: Yes. The author is offered a chance to buy copies at a nominal price. Author given the option to revert the copyright to them.

NE: Yes. We have a form letter for this. We have a slightly different letter for authors whose books are to be remaindered.

UNC: Absolutely!!! And send them 5 free copies. Sometimes offer them more at 90% discount.

SC: Yes. Before we remainder, we contact the author giving them a chance to buy up the remaining stock.

Minnesota: Yes (see above). Our contract obligates us to do so; yours probably does too.

Question 6: *Do you make use of on-demand publishing technology?*

Toronto: Yes. (no explanation)

Florida: Yes, UMI—initiated when the letter is mailed to the author.

Iowa: Not yet.

Texas: Yes, UMI.

Penn St: Not really, but have used Docutech technology for one book.

NE: No, except that we do turn many books over to UMI for servicing. This doesn't generate much income.

UNC: No. But send a copy of all OP books to UMI.

SC: We haven't as yet, but we are investigating.

Minnesota: Just beginning to.

Question 7: *Who (or what department) in your organization is responsible for overseeing the OP process?*

Toronto: Marketing

Florida: Marketing

Iowa: Marketing Manager and Director

Texas: Marketing Manager

Penn St: The Director, in consultation with the Marketing Manager and Business Manager.

NE: Initially marketing reviews sales and stock levels, although finance/operations takes over after initial review.

UNC: Business manager. Marketing initiates, managers group comments, controller does final OP notice (directing others' followup), dir asst informs authors (as the person who sends out the original contract letter).

SC: Marketing in conjunction with business.

Minnesota: Senior managers (business, marketing, and director) ☛