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University Presses and Academic Libraries Demystified: A Conversation

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Ellen Faran, Director, MIT Press
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Leila Salisbury: This is very rewarding to see such a full room at 4:30 on a Friday afternoon, so we promise to solve all of the questions and problems of libraries and university publishers as a thank you. This session with university presses and academic libraries actually picks up on a thread begun at last year's Charleston plenary on the past, present, and future of university presses. Today, we have a group of librarians and publishers who will engage in a discussion designed to drive, delve into the inner workings of our operations, and to facilitate a fruitful discussion of some of the challenges and the pain points that both presses and libraries each face in their day-to-day work. We will touch on topics both of process and philosophy as part of the discussion. The larger question that looms behind many of the things we will talk about today is in this age of electronic content and access, how do librarians and publishers continue to successfully serve their academic communities, and what do the finances of that service model look like?

Today, each of our panelists will open with a brief opening statement: "One thing I wish everyone knew about publishers or libraries," and the discussion will follow. We will make sure to leave time for questions. Last year we ran out of time, so we want to get a lively discussion going both among the panelists and also with the audience here today. The order of speakers today will begin with Ellen Faran, director at the MIT Press. She will be followed by Fred Heath, Vice Provost and Director of the University of Texas Libraries at UT Austin. Peter Berkery is the Director of the Association of American University Presses, and Angela Carreño is Head of Collection Development

for the Division of Libraries at NYU. So we will start with Ellen.

Ellen Faran: One thing that I wish everyone understood about publishers is that identifying a standard cost for publishing a monograph is really difficult. What does it cost to publish a monograph is a question gathering some steam in the academic community. Various initiatives are exploring new ways of supporting monographs. Can we increase subsidies for university presses on a title-by-title basis in conjunction with open access publishing? In other words, can we move to author-paid books? Presses are eager for this conversation, but the answer to what does it cost is not simple.

Here are three quick reasons why it is not simple:

Our workflow is constantly evolving. Today's technologies and today's mixture of in-house work versus outside vendor work does not necessarily predict our costs even 2 years from now.

We do not publish standalone titles. We publish lists. Our publishing expenses support each monograph but in the context of our entire list in its field. Many expenses benefit multiple titles both new and backlist. As you know, presses invest in their disciplines of focus nurturing the meaning that their imprint has to authors, to librarians, and to readers helping to shape scholarly inquiry in the grouping of works in those fields. Our monographs are connected building blocks of scholarship.

Our overhead expenses reflect all of the changing publishing activities of the press. Each monograph needs to contribute to general expenses but by what method of allocation? Monographs may comprise the entire program for a small press or sit alongside trade, text, or regional books,

journals, and/or digital products for larger presses. Our overhead expenses reflect the commitments that we have made to channels of dissemination, its broadest possible audience. As we incorporate more subsidized open access titles into our programs, we will need to do some new thinking about overhead allocation. Allocating publishing costs is especially hard during periods of transition as we know from the ongoing shift from print to digital. It will certainly be the case as presses make the anticipated shift in financial support away from marketplace revenues toward a more subsidized environment.

To be as clear as possible, in conclusion, I am thrilled to be asked "What does it cost to publish a monograph?" especially by someone considering giving me money. The only point I am making here is that answering that question necessarily reflects all of the activities that my press does to support scholarly communication and that is a moving target.

Peter Berkery: Afternoon. Leila suggested that I begin by talking just a little bit about what I have experienced and observed in my first 8 months as the executive director of AAUP. Shortly after coming on board, I embarked on what we are referring to internally as "a listening tour," which is, I imagine, a phrase that is familiar to those of you who are ARL members. I snatched it from Elliott Shore. By the way, if you are an ARL member, congratulations. Elliott is inspirational. I really hope that I can provide the kind of leadership and indefectible new energy to AAUP that he brings to your organization. He is phenomenal. In any event, I stole his phrase, and I have been out visiting AAUP member presses; so far I have been to 28 campuses, and I think that there are a couple of important things to note from those visits.

First and foremost is the heterogeneity of the university press community. It never ceases to amaze me that, in an organization of 133 entities, two-thirds of whom all have the same two words in their name, very little looks alike once you get past that. The uniqueness can vary by publishing mix, who is doing journals, who is doing monographs, print versus electronic, whether there is regional in the mix or trade. If, perhaps,

you are doing some textbook publishing, that is a big influence on who you are and how you behave. Organizational alignment within your institution is critical. Are you part of the library? Are you a system press? Do you report to a Provost, or the Dean, or occasionally an academic department? Finally, what is the overall politics and financial landscape in your university? And the point of all this is that it amazes me to say that with only 133 data points, I really have to be careful about my generalizations because the truth is, no matter what I say today, tomorrow, 20 years from now, there is always going to be some AAUP member in the back of the room who can raise her hand and say, "Well, it is actually not that way at my press."

So with that caveat, one thing actually has become clear in the course of these visits and that is the twin challenges of the technology disruption and the corporatization of the academy are placing unprecedented pressure on university presses—frankly, existential pressure in the case of some small and midsize presses. Four particular themes emerged from the conversations that I had with press directors and press staff about what AAUP might do to help its members respond to these twin challenges. All of them are interesting, but some are only obliquely related to our purpose here today, so I may gloss over a couple of them. Those four themes are advocacy, scale, community and education, and data. I will start by touching just briefly on advocacy, because by advocacy, what our members are hoping that we can do more of is help establish the value of the university press and its contribution within the university ecosystem. Publishers traditionally promote titles and authors so we actually do not know in many cases how to promote ourselves as an entity and as a valuable component of the university. Plus, frankly, many of us are just an asterisk on our administrators' agendas, and it is really difficult to get mind share when you are such a small piece of a bigger picture. So that is one contribution to the challenges we face.

Second, I mentioned scale. Commercial publishers are merging in part to achieve scale; we have Random Penguin as the latest example of that. Unfortunately, or fortunately, MIT Press cannot

acquire Harvard, so how do university presses achieve scale? Are there things perhaps that we can do consortially that might achieve similar results? And a good example of where this is has already occurred is in the case of the content aggregation platforms like Project MUSE and University Press Scholarship Online. But there are other areas and other functions within a press that we might explore "consortializing," and those would include production, sales and marketing, back-office operations, rights, and the list could go on. I am open to whatever develops as I have these conversations.

The third area of concern touched on community and education, and that is kind of internal to the Association, so it is a little bit out of scope here.

Finally, the fourth area of need centered on data. Frankly, there is no shortage of things that we just do not know about ourselves as a community. We do not know how to quantify the value of a university press to a campus, a community, or a region. We do not have reliable data on the dramatic shift in library purchasing patterns. As Ellen mentioned, we do not have current, aggregate, granular data on the cost of publishing a monograph.

So those are the four sorts of themes and the four sorts of challenges that we think we face as a community in the months and years ahead.

I will close on just a little bit of random note but an important one. If I had to answer the very specific question, "What is the one thing that I would like libraries to know about university presses," it has to do with permissions. Now I understand that permissions are a fabulous problem both from the compliance and administrations perspective. All of our members pay permission fees, so we know the pain ourselves, and we are actually trying to figure out ways to ease that burden. Unfortunately, that is all my antitrust counsel will let me say about that for now but we are working on it. I really do want you to know, though, just how important a revenue source they are for university presses. Because permissions come in on the bottom line of a press P&L, they actually have a multiplier, effect, so one dollar in permissions revenue is the

same thing as $5–7 in sales revenue on the top line. All of which is to say: permissions income is hugely important to many university presses. At virtually every member AAUP press, mission-critical programs and headcount would have to be eliminated without permissions income. So, that is the one morsel that I would like you all to know about us. Thanks.

Angela Carreño: As a collection manager, I make practical decisions about the low-use scholarly monograph that are so important to the humanities and central to the work of the university presses, and some of the things that I think would surprise the presses is that I believe that we are in the same ecosystem when it comes to scholarly communication. When I do my work, I try to keep in mind that we revert back to the mission of the university and have to think very carefully about the role of the library in the creation of new knowledge and that support of learning, and when it comes to the low-use scholarly monograph, I do not necessarily associate value with use. It could be that I come from a foreign acquisitions background and I am quite used to six copies of a particular book being available nationwide. I have had many years of a routine of collaborating with other research libraries to ensure the breadth of collections, but when it comes to that low-use scholarly monograph, I think it is very important to partner with university presses in understanding what sustainability means. It is odd because we know so little about each other. The presses have no idea what we buy and do not know about our metadata pains and how that ties in with discovery, and we have no idea how they figure out their business model or how they come up with the price of the book, and yet we have to come together and figure out sustainability. So I am so glad we are having this meeting, and I really believe that the dialogue is long overdue. What I think is probably surprising to the university presses is that I care quite passionately about that sustainability.

Leila Salisbury: All right. Well, we will just dive right in here. We are going to make this a panel discussion, so I wanted to just start with one of the issues we possibly have the fewest answers

to: the issue of open access and content pricing. I wanted to open this part of the discussion with a little bit fuller version of Stewart Brand's infamous quote to start us off:

> On one hand, information wants to be expensive because it is so valuable. The right information in the right place just changes your life. On the other hand, information wants to be free because the cost of getting it out is lower and lower all the time. So you have these two fighting against each other.

I think we are all very familiar with one part of that phrase but maybe not the other. I think that gets at the heart of what we struggle with as libraries and publishers. So considering this constant tug of war between the two extremes of expensive and free, how do we reconcile those two things and is some content more valuable than others?

Peter Berkery: I actually think that the answer lies in not reconciling the two things. I think in order to get to where most of the folks in the room want to be, the two have to remain in tension, and it is actually the tension that will produce the answer that we are all looking for. The challenge right now is you have got one group of folks who want to pretend that nothing needs to change and you have got another group of folks who want to pretend that what they want does not cost anything, and so the most extreme voices on both sides of this debate get strident, get attention, and may generate more heat than light, and the rest of us are sort of stuck in the middle here without an answer to the question. I think, just to round that out, the answer to the question lies in respecting the tension between both parts of what Brand is saying.

Leila Salisbury: In light of this, what do we do with the scholarly monograph? You know, I have heard a number of people at this meeting talk about use determining value and then others who are very opposed to that concept. It seems that most of the tension does seem to be focused on the scholarly monograph. What do we, as librarians or publishers, do about that?

Angela Carreño: In New York, we established a consortium called the Manhattan Research Library's Initiative, and it fosters collaboration between Columbia University Libraries, the New York Public Library Research Libraries, and NYU; one of the big issues we work on together is how to explore the approach to the low use scholarly monograph, and we have a pilot project in place with Oxford University Press for coverage of the UPSO collection of university press books. I think that has helped us understand new approaches and has been very valuable.

Ellen Faran: University presses, most of them still get most of their money by the sale of books and journals, and that means that our money comes in by the unit, by selling a certain number of units of something. I think that structure made good sense before the Internet in a world where distribution meant the distribution of the unit of a work. It was sensible to have our financial support tied appropriately to the objective of disseminating work, but now the concept of units has just gone out the window, and it seems to me that monographs are sort of the key example to that. The thing that has been steady throughout everything else changing is the tenure requirement to write a book, but accompanying that has been the specialization of the academy. A big factor that is affecting both libraries and presses is that scholars are working in more and more narrow fields, and we used to be trying to get the work of an author to 1,500 people. Now we are trying to get it to 137 people, so am just seconding the idea that the tenure requirement is an oddly static factor in a swirling cauldron of change around it.

Leila Salisbury: While we are talking about the money end of things, is this the time to make a philosophical and a financial shift to the concept of paying for access and usability rather than simply paying for content? Is there anything to that?

Angela Carreño: I worked hard on cutting back on duplication between research libraries in the New York area and maintaining the revenue level jointly with research libraries in the New York area to commit to a broader range of scholarly monographs. We have tried to hold the spend and

keep it the same rather than cut back on the spend when it comes to access only. There is a level of discomfort in terms of collection stewardship, because I care about understanding the terms of use associated with the content and the dialogue with the publishers. I want a perpetual access clause that is meaningful. If we are freeing up the content, maybe jointly we can think through DRM. So access only moving through an aggregator without a dialogue with the publishers misses out on some of that, and I find it is important.

Ellen Faran: I think that we are now permanently in a world of multiple business models, and some stuff is going to be owned and some stuff is going to be accessed and that will be the way it is. I think that we are particularly thinking about this with textbooks because of students really letting go of any kind of desire to own their own library of books which seems to have to do with iTunes and Netflix and other sort of concepts where they do not need to feel like after they use or read the content it remains with them, and that is a big cultural shift for us to deal with.

Peter Berkery: It is not just books though, it is the Zip Cars and City Bikes, right? It is a generational shift in thinking.

Leila Salisbury: During a previous discussion among the panelists, Angela had asked the very good question, "What is a collecting strategy that sustains the low-usage model during a time when many libraries believe that access to the collection is enough?" You have touched on that a little bit today, and the flip side of the question is how do university presses deal with that? Is there a publishing model that sustains low-usage material? Of course, I guess if we knew that, then really there would be no need for this discussion. The silence may mean that we have no answer.

Peter Berkery: Well, does part of the answer not have to be for low-usage content a shift from pay to read to pay to publish? If there is a third option I have not heard anybody suggest it.

Leila Salisbury: During our earlier discussion after Angela talked about this low-usage model, Fred gave a very interesting response. He said,

"Scholars have an information need not a monograph need." To me that really got to the heart of a lot of what we are struggling with as publishers, so how do we respond to this statement? And if monographs are indeed the problem, what should university presses be publishing?

Ellen Faran: I think that that one takes us back to the question of books and tenure requirements. If the contribution that an individual scholar makes today is changing, has changed, and could be measured by their contribution to a collaborative project or the programming that they figured out around a digital something and not by a book length argument that had to be at least 236 pages long, then we could talk about publishing those original contributions or highlighting them or whatever the appropriate thing is for the digital stuff and not having to do it in that long-form object. That would open everything up, but as far as I can tell that is not about to change.

Peter Berkery: Yeah, I wonder if, and maybe I am just saying the same thing in a different way, I wonder though if the real catalyst here is not the technology disruption? You know, we think about and consume short-form and long-form scholarship in increasingly different ways, and maybe symptoms of things like the tenure discussion, the low-use collection discussion, and even the "what should university presses" discussion are all just kind of more symptoms of the root cause? Then the root cause is actually that technology is changing the way that we think about what is long-form and what is short-form scholarship.

Leila Salisbury: Let us talk for a couple of minutes, before we open it up to questions from the audience, about data. I really liked Angela's comment a couple of minutes ago: "University presses do not know how we buy," and what our metadata pains points are, and to me this has been one of the most vexing issues surrounding this technology disruption. I feel like at the very moment where publishers and, in particular, university presses, need to know more about the end user or individual customer, we are increasingly reliant on third-party vendors or mediators to reach our end users, and so there is

this growing disconnect between us; so I ask everybody here how do we get closer to our users?

Peter Bekerey: Well, we are pretty close.

Leila Salisbury: Physically, today, yes! But in terms of the nuts and bolts, with limited information, we are left guessing what users and libraries want. What formats? What are your metadata pain points? Do we need to be in closer contact with the vendors? Do we need to be going around making site visits at libraries very regularly?

Angela Carreño: I mentioned the pilot project we have going on in New York with UPSO, and we have plans to do assessment work looking at data points. I think if you start to do that project by project and share the data with the presses, we both learn, but it feels like a starting point for us. It is not the sort of assessment work we have done in the past with a concentration on university presses.

Peter Berkery: I think, maybe, too, one of the challenges is that we are each only part of the other's kind of environment, if you will. Libraries account for probably something around 25%, academic research libraries account for something around 25% of university presses' revenues and I do not even know what the number is, but I know that we are a very small percentage, maybe 3% or 4% of research library budgets are spent on university press titles. So you have got the reality of that on the one hand, but on the other hand I think we both have a disproportionate understanding of how important we each are to the scholarly communication ecosystem and, therefore, a disproportionate interest in trying to make things better.

Leila Salisbury: Fred had pulled together some data because we were talking about the commonly held wisdom that about 20–25% of university press revenue comes from academic libraries. Fred and Angela pulled together some interesting data. Texas spent between 20% and 21% of its book budget on university press content. NYU spent about 39% of its print book budget for its U.S. libraries on university press content, and about 9.2% of its budgeted funds on university press electronic content. To me, those were, in some ways, higher numbers, particularly for NYU, than what I had expected. That is why it is so difficult to figure these things out, and I will just throw out one other quick data point that will lead to a question about short-term loan. One of the things that we have seen is a transition from approval plan purchasing to PDA, DDA, and short-term loans. I got a set of data for our own press from our vendor, YBP, recently, and, unsurprisingly, it is showing print book erosion. Not a surprise. What was a surprise was not the fact that there was a great uptake in DDA programs and STL, but what the revenue for those programs was, in our case, print erosion of about $20,000 in sales was only offset by growth in combined DDA and short-term loan of $5,000, so you are looking at about a quarter of new revenue to replace this full $20,000 that is going away. Maybe, could the librarians talk a little bit about short-term loan and how that is figuring into what you are doing? Is STL not the problem, or should university presses be handling this differently?

Angela Carreño: NYU has not done demand-driven acquisitions with the short-term loan approach so I do not have direct experience with that, but maybe someone in the audience would want to comment.

Leila Salisbury: I am going to go ahead and bring the other mic out. This seems like a good time to open up the audience questions.

[Note: Fred Heath from the University of Texas at Austin presented but did not grant permission for his portion of the transcript to be published, so it has been omitted from the proceedings.]