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From the University Presses -- Anachronisms or Innovators? Reflections on University Presses As Portrayed in the Ithaka Report

Sanford G. Thatcher

Penn State Press, sgt3@psu.edu

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Biz of Acq
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Problems to Watch Out For

As with your personal credit cards, it is important to reconcile the monthly statements against purchases received that month. Some sites, including **Barnes and Noble** and **Amazon.com**, charge your credit card only when the item is about to be shipped from their warehouses. Other sites assess the cost to your credit card immediately upon receipt of your order. This means that the charge will appear before you receive your material if there is any delay in shipping.

The monthly statement is a great reminder to verify the receipt of your orders. On several occasions we've had independent book dealers that no longer own the particular title consider the money that they've received as a back order. If they don't have it in stock, the book dealers are supposed to issue a refund. Some major Websites, such as **Amazon.com**, will intercede between the buyer and dealer in disputes over merchandise listed on their Websites but under limited time restrictions.

You may have problems with your credit limit. For instance my university has placed a cap of \$500 for a single transaction. On big orders I've had to split up my purchases over several transactions and even once have the dealer split my order for a set that costs more than \$500 over several transactions. It is possible to exceed your monthly credit limit when expenditures from one month are encumbered on the next. **The Kresge Business Administration Library** at the **University of Michigan** has negotiated a large monthly spending limit to cover their periodic database expenditures.

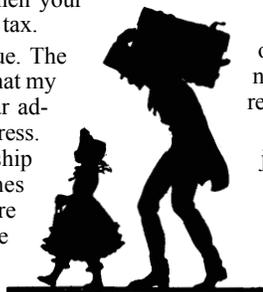
Another issue that occasionally occurs

is over state sales tax. Some Websites will automatically charge sales tax for orders to certain states. If your institution is sales tax exempt, you may need to provide the necessary paperwork to remove this charge. For instance, **Barnes and Noble** will require the sales tax exemption paperwork once, and then your future orders will exempt the sales tax.

The bill-to address can be an issue. The Purchasing Department decided what my account address is. This particular address does not include a street address. Some credit card sites will only ship to the address that exactly matches the bill-to address, but others require a street address. Fortunately some sites will allow you to list separate bill-to and ship-to addresses.

A final warning involves those official-looking notices that come in requesting account verification. It looks as if your **Amazon.com** account has problems, and you are being asked again for your credit card number and other personal information. Those spam requests are dangerous attempts at identity theft. **Amazon.com** is one of the Websites that wants to be notified whenever these illegal requests occur.

Despite the occasional hassle just mentioned, the credit card has become an integral tool in acquiring information for our patrons. If you don't have one, ask your administration for one. 🍷



From the University Presses — Anachronisms or Innovators?

Reflections on University Presses As Portrayed in the Ithaka Report

Column Editor: **Sanford G. Thatcher** (Director, Penn State Press, USB 1, Suite C, 820 N. University Drive, University Park, PA 16802-1003; Phone: 814-865-1327; Fax: 814-863-1408) <sgt3@psu.edu> www.psupress.org

The much anticipated *Ithaka Report* titled "University Publishing in a Digital Age," pre-released for comment to a select group on June 5 and then published to the world on July 26, has come as a wakeup call to the university press community. While long feeling marginalized from discussions about the future of scholarly

communication (as in reports last year from the **ACLS** on cyberinfrastructure, reviewed in my previous column, and from the **Berkman Center** on changes needed in the copyright system), many in our community nevertheless were shocked to learn from the *Ithaka*

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Report that we are regarded even by some librarians as “anachronisms” (p.18) rather than innovators, as we like to view ourselves in our more optimistic moments — albeit frustrated innovators as the lack of funding available to our presses imposes severe limits on what we can accomplish.

Thus the *Report* confirms the impression that presses have frequently encountered in recent years that they are seen as more part of the problem than part of the solution to the crisis in scholarly communication. In striking contrast to the *ACLS Report*, however, the *Ithaka Report* views this attitude itself as part of the problem and argues that universities stand to lose a lot if they act on this attitude rather than trying to figure out how presses can best fit into an overall publishing strategy to which they can make important contributions along with libraries, computer operations, academic departments, and research centers. It is perhaps not surprising that the *Ithaka Report* adopts this stance since its principal author was **Laura Brown**, former head of **Oxford University Press** in America, who persuaded the **Ithaka Group** to undertake this study with financial support from **JSTOR** and did much of the interviewing for it herself along with two **Ithaka** colleagues, co-authors **Rebecca Griffiths** and **Matthew Rascoff**.

The *Report* focuses principally on the relationship of the university press to its immediate local community, and among its chief recommendations is that presses find ways to integrate their own missions better with the missions of their parent universities. This is indeed a major concern for presses, and the *Report* is right to emphasize it as a goal. But presses are not only parts of their universities; they also exist as parts of an industry, and the requirements and pressures of that industry have a lot to do with the current plight of scholarly publishing. For that reason, this *Report* is best read in conjunction with an article about university presses written by **Joseph Esposito**, “The Wisdom Of Oz: The Role of the University Press in Scholarly Communications” (*Journal of Electronic Publishing*, vol. 10, no. 1, Winter 2007), and the book by **Polity Press** publisher and **Cambridge** sociologist **John Thompson**, *Books in the Digital Age* (Polity, 2005), both cited in the *Report*’s footnotes. A full appreciation of the constraints and opportunities facing university presses today can only come from understanding their situation both within their own institutions, from which they derive their basic missions to serve scholarship and outreach, and within the larger industry in which they function as businesses. It is no accident that the plenary session on the draft *Ithaka Report* at the annual meeting of university presses in June 2007 included both **Laura Brown** and **Joe Esposito** as interlocutors.

What underlies the predicament of presses — though not expressed by the *Report* in these economic terms — is at heart a problem stemming from the logic of collective action, as identified in the classic book by **Mancur**

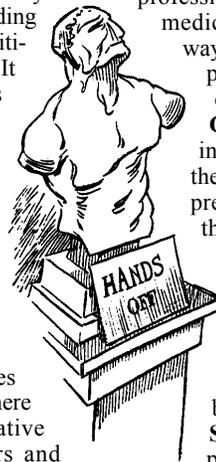
Olson published by **Harvard** in 1965. With 88 presses in the U.S. serving the entire community of scholarship worldwide, the nearly 3,000 institutions of higher education that do not directly support presses benefit as “free riders” on the system. And with the presses at their own institutions mostly serving faculty elsewhere, as noted in the *Report*, administrators do not give a high priority to thinking about or funding their local presses since the immediate impact on their own institutions is small relative to the presses’ contribution to the overall “public good” of disseminating knowledge. This contrasts sharply with the situation of libraries, of course, since libraries are first and foremost dedicated to serving their immediate constituency of local faculty and students. Funding for libraries is thus defensible “politically” in a way it is not for presses. It is not so surprising, viewed in this context, that “provosts put limited resources and attention towards what they perceive to be a service to the broader community” and that “over time, and in pursuit of the largest public service to the global academic community, presses have tended to grow disconnected from the administrations at their host universities” (p. 17). As businesses and even entire national economies do, presses must develop niches where they can have the best “comparative advantage” vis-à-vis competitors and achieve “economies of scale” in publishing that derive from concentrating resources in a few special fields. They even operate at a disadvantage with respect to faculty at their home institutions since “they actually often prefer to publish their books at presses other than their own, because institutional distance avoids any suggestion of favoritism and provides external validation” (p.17).

What solutions does the *Report* propose? Besides urging presses to think more and work harder at creating alliances with other groups on campus, within the framework of a vision set forth in a five-year strategic plan, the *Report* calls on administrators to step up to the plate by taking responsibility for finding out about what various kinds of publishing activity, both formal (peer-reviewed) and informal, are happening on their campuses and then coordinating efforts to rationalize the process by setting priorities for funding and other kinds of support. Librarians, praised for their initiatives in redefining their roles and experimenting with new technological ways to provide access to their collections and encourage faculty and students to use them, are nevertheless cautioned to realize that in becoming publishers they lack certain important skills — in editorial evaluation, copyediting, design, marketing, and order-fulfillment — that publishers have developed as their own “value added” to the process of scholarly communication. A whole section of the *Report* is therefore devoted to “collaborations between the press and library [that] can create value” (p.26) and Appendix B is devoted to outlining the respective strengths and weaknesses of each as potential partners.

While noting that the press has been administratively brought under the library’s wing at **Penn State**, the *Report* is careful to add that it does not “advocate a specific configuration or reporting structure” (p.29) for the coordination of publishing activities but rather encourages a diversity of approaches in keeping with the differences among universities themselves.

In recommending that presses integrate themselves better into the missions and priorities of their parent universities, the *Report* does not have much to say about one obvious challenge that most presses face: being located at major research universities where science and engineering play a dominant role in securing external funding, and where at many of them professional schools in business, law, and medicine also contribute in substantial ways to their prestige, very few presses publish in these fields. The results of the survey of presses the **Ithaka Group** conducted, as summarized in charts in Appendix E, reveal that the title output of books published by presses in **STM**, for example, is less than 10%, and even lower for business and law. The small number of presses that do publish in science concentrate almost exclusively on theoretical rather than applied science. Although a handful of presses have announced plans to begin publishing books in business, **Stanford** is alone among major U.S. presses now that have oriented their

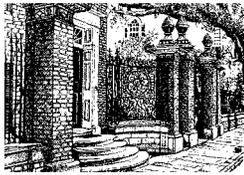
publishing programs to emphasize professional publishing more. And in law, while many presses publish in peripheral areas like international law and philosophy of law, hardly any presses publish in the hard core areas of torts and contracts, for example; constitutional law is about the only central area of law in which university presses regularly publish. So, how do presses become more crucial contributors to their universities if they stay out of these scientific and professional fields of publishing, either by necessity (owing to the high entry cost of competing against giant commercial publishers now dominating these fields) or choice (owing to their traditional allegiances to the liberal arts)? The *Report* does not say. The closest it comes occurs in Appendix C, where “recommendations to press directors” call on them, among other things, to “take an inventory of the exciting new academic ventures at their institutions, and consider which ones might lend themselves to publishing programs, [and] they should reach out to professional schools to form publishing alliances and joint ventures” (p.39). The best advice comes, rather, from **Joe Esposito**, who recommends in his article that presses, taking advantage of their greater proximate access to scholars and emerging trends in academic disciplines, should “identify new areas of scholarship and dominate them before a commercial organization even gets started,” as he notes that the **MIT Press** did with cognitive science, a field in which it has become a dominant publisher able to stave off competition from the commercial sector. One possible avenue here is for the presses in the



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From the University Presses from page 88

Big Ten and **Chicago** (through the academic consortium known as the **Committee on Institutional Cooperation**) to work with the **CIC** libraries on collaborative projects extending the shared digital repository that they have agreed to establish from their partnership with **Google** in digitizing special collections that represent strengths of their own universities across many disciplines including the sciences.

Probably the strongest theme that emerges from the *Report's* recommendations is the emphasis on the crucial importance of scale to be successful in digital publishing. In fact, **Kevin Guthrie** of **JSTOR** acknowledges in his Preface that **JSTOR** is interested in "playing a role in establishing" the kind of "powerful technology, service and marketing platform that would serve as a catalyst for collaboration and shared capital investment in university-based publishing" that the *Report* concludes to be so essential to overcoming the present impasse in which underfunded university presses find themselves. This emphasis no doubt also reflects the experience of **Laura Brown** during her tenure as director of **OUP** when **Oxford Online** was developed. The problem with this emphasis is twofold: no U.S. press comes close to having the capability **OUP** does of aggregating sufficient monographic content in particular disciplines to create a marketable product saleable by license to libraries; and the *Report* provides no clue as to where funding

for a shared platform would come from. The effect of this emphasis, therefore, is bound to be mostly discouraging for U.S. presses. Told that they are not big enough to go it alone as **OUP** has, and given no hope of any funding to create the envisioned shared platform, presses could be excused for giving up the battle before the first shot is fired. But that would be an unfortunate result, not really intended by the *Report's* authors who desperately want to encourage presses to experiment more and universities to support such experimentation, preferably in conjunction with libraries and other campus entities. And it does not fairly reflect the range of possibilities for experimentation short of large scale. At **Penn State** we have a modest effort under way (duly noted in the *Report*) to publish a series in *Romance Studies* that combines Open Access with a POD option, much as the **National Academies Press** has done successfully with its science publishing. Such efforts are not beyond the means of most presses, especially if they enlist the cooperation of the libraries on their campuses, but they should also be planned with a view to scaling up over time, as our project might eventually do within the framework of the **CIC** (which in 1996 had submitted a proposal to **Mellon** for funding the start-up costs of just such a collaborative venture among presses, libraries, and computer centers, as explained here: <http://www.arl.org/resources/pubs/specscholmono/creth.shtml>). As for funding possibilities, former **University of Michigan Press** editor **Jim Reische** has it exactly right in his remarks on the *Ithaka Report* found

at the site hosting an online version open to public comment: <http://scholarlypublishing.org/ithakareport/general-comments>. "The fact is that the money is just not there, and that until someone can come up with not only a creative, but also a realistic and stable source of venture capital for university presses, our little insiders' discussion will rev on and on in neutral without ever moving an inch." He goes on to propose contemplating seriously the need for a significant one-time infusion of government financial support to kick-start the process — "a sort of academic New Deal that would enable us as a society to do something that we know will benefit the common good, but which we also know will never happen without external subsidy." He mentions rural electrification as an example of a New Deal program that succeeded in this way, but an even more apt example in this context would surely be the federal government's crucial early support for developing what became the Internet. **Mr. Reische** is aiming high here, and with the current Administration's anti-intellectual bias well known, such an initiative would surely have to await the coming of a new Administration — and probably also the end of the Iraq quagmire. But he may well be right that what is needed may be beyond even the means of a group of universities banded together in the kind of consortium that the **CIC** represents.

And what may also be beyond their means is the realization of the second stage of the transformation that the *Report* attributes to the impact of new technologies. The first stage,

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which involves “the translation of traditional print products into electronic formats,” is well advanced, as the *Report* notes (on p.8). But “the second stage of the transformation — the creation of new product types enabled by digital technologies — has just begun.” **Project Muse** is a prime example of a **Mellon**-funded experiment that succeeded in the first stage. Examples of the second stage, also funded by **Mellon**, include the **ACLS History** (now **Humanities**) **E-Book Project** and **Gutenberg-e**, but these, the *Report* observes, have only met with “mixed success” (p.14) and are not clearly sustainable over the long haul without continuing subvention. Thus the vision of **Cornell** librarian **Ross Atkinson** (as presented in his article in the May 1993 issue of *College & Research Libraries*) who foresaw the possibility of hierarchically layered texts (a document structure he called “concentric stratification”) arising from the use of the new technologies — has not yet been fully realized. This notion was adopted by **Robert Darnton** in his widely cited *New York Review of Books* essay, “The New Age of the Book” (March 18, 1999) — alas, without attribution to **Atkinson** as its source — and it became the inspiration for both the **ACLS Project** and **Gutenberg-e**, which **Darnton** was instrumental in getting funded and launched during his tenure as President of the **American Historical Association** — and also for the experimental multilayered electronic book that **Darnton** is under contract with **Columbia University Press** to publish himself. Such creative full use of the potential of the new technologies to produce digital works that can have no exact counterpart in the analogue world, as we have already learned, can be enormously expensive in both time and money and may be beyond the reach of a self-sustaining scholarly communication system. We may have to content ourselves with the occasional high-profile experiments carried out by dedicated pioneers like **Edward Ayres**, who birthed the justly lauded **Civil War** project called the **Valley of the Shadow**. But, short of such ambitious undertakings, there is still plenty that presses can do to move farther along the path of the second stage of transformation, especially in the creation of hybrid texts conjoining print products with online ancillary materials that can enhance the evidentiary and documentary richness of the monographic literature without going the full distance toward **Darnton**’s (and **Atkinson**’s) ideal.

While acknowledging the major role that **JSTOR** has played in the first stage of transformation and thanking **Kevin Guthrie** for suggesting a catalytic role for **JSTOR** to play in the next stage, one should also realize that another **Mellon**-funded venture, **Project Muse**, is perhaps in an even better position to provide the recommended platform, if only because it is structured to provide access to current journal content, with no “moving wall.” Indeed, some directors of presses that are members of **Muse** including myself have proposed to **The Johns Hopkins University Press** that it contemplate

adding monographs to its already rich database of journal literature in the humanities and social sciences, and the proposal is currently under consideration. A collaboration between **Muse** and **JSTOR** to which many presses also belong could potentially provide the best of all possible worlds, enabling access to older literature through **JSTOR** and current literature through **Muse**, seamlessly connected through **Cross-Ref**-type hyperlinking to new monographic content employing DOIs to the chapter level. There is no coherent intellectual justification for the present compartmentalization of the journal and book literature. The behavioral changes in scholars’ ways of accessing and using content, which the *Report* usefully summarizes, will inevitably demand closure of this unfortunate “digital divide,” which currently segregates the bulk of monographic content in printed books with circulations numbering in the few hundreds from the vastly more accessible content in journals, fast becoming even more accessible as the “Open Access” movement encourages the growth of more journals free to end users.

The alternative to universities not soon taking the initiative to close this digital divide themselves is the prospect of well-financed commercial publishers entering this space. Indeed, as the *Report* notes, **STM** publishers like **Elsevier** and **Springer** are already embarked on the effort to add books to their journal collections in science, while **Amazon** and **Google** are both gearing up to sell book content online. The path is already being laid in the social sciences by **Wiley/Blackwell**, whose creation by merger the *Report* announces as an example of the increasing consolidation of the industry into a few gigantic players but whose recent acquisition of **AnthroSource** from the **American Anthropological Association**, formerly published through the **University of California Press**, occurred after the *Report*’s

release — but should constitute a loud warning shot across the bow for all press directors and university administrators. In a section headed “Flight to scale threatens all but the largest publishers,” the *Report* observes that “through their scale, fiscal health, and access to capital markets, the largest publishers (most of which are commercial) are able to offer more generous terms and better services...to scholarly societies and authors for the rights to publish their work” (p.8). But there is a down side to commercial dominance of scholarly publishing: “the commercial publishers are pursuing different objectives that may not lead to desirable outcomes for universities; for example, universities have an interest in exploring ways to use new technologies to reduce costs of publishing so that the monograph continues to be a viable format for new authors and those in less mainstream fields. Commercial publishers are focused instead on maximizing scale” to achieve greater profits for their shareholders (p.21). This is hardly the first time such a warning has been issued. A full decade ago, at a conference co-sponsored by the **AAUP**, **ARL**, and **ACLS**, I urged universities to take the initiative in developing innovative new business models for digital publishing lest for-profit companies enter the arena and replicate the now much bemoaned monopolization of **STM** journal publishing: <http://www.arl.org/resources/pubs/specscholmono/thatcher.shtml>. **Ross Atkinson**, way back in 1993, envisioned the use of new technologies to bridge the gap between journal and book content in creating multilayered documents. We would do well to work together within universities, drawing on our own collective pool of talents, to develop that vision into a reality, rather than once again allowing adventurous and nimble-footed commercial publishers to create new monopolies, which in the end will cost all of us dearly. 🌱



Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — eBooks

Column Editor: **Bob Nardini** (Group Director, Client Integration and Head Bibliographer, Coutts Information Services) <bnardini@couttsinfo.com>

The biggest success story of the past ten years in academic libraries, without a doubt, has been eBooks. This may surprise many readers, but when seen in the right light, there’s no contest.

Nobody knows how many eBooks there are. It’s hard to find out when a new one becomes available, and when it does, it might be a new title and might be an older one. Then, there’s no consensus on how to budget for them, on how to buy them, on who should buy them or who to buy them from, on how much they cost, or if it’s best to buy one-at-a-time or in bulk. Then, there’s the option not to buy at all, but to subscribe instead. Once acquired, the workflows to receive eBooks, pay for them, and make them available to users are being made up

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There’s always a breakthrough eBook reader on the horizon, but so far nothing has broken through. The one thing everyone agrees on is

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