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Comments on Self-Publishing from a Small-Press Publisher

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adult novel when I joined the staff and had been invited to hold a reading and Q&A that would be led by one of the editors of the student arts journal. Because it’s only natural that we should collect the works of authors we invite to read at Powell, Stasse’s novel was included in the Recent Fiction Collection.

Once I had settled into my job, Kelly, having set a precedent for staff readings with Lisa Stasse, asked if I wanted to hold a reading for Other Life Forms. Relieved and excited, I sat down with her to discuss logistics. Was it reasonable for the library to obtain a copy of the book? Of course. What about the conflict of interest? We decided that, even though I collect recent fiction, I shouldn’t be the one to place the order; so we’re currently exploring other, more ethical ways to add the book to the collection. We haven’t dealt with UCLA’s official conflict of interest policy yet; but the fact that the decision fits within existing policy, is based on a clear precedent, and comes from the head of the library rather than me personally puts us in a much stronger position to obtain an exception. And if the exception isn’t granted, then I’ll buy a copy myself and donate it.

The conflict of interest policy, while well-intentioned, creates a frustrating barrier to collecting self-published work — not least because, when collecting zines, I must email dozens upon dozens of writers to ask whether they, any of their family members, or any of their students are employed by UC. If it happens that a self-publishing writer has, say, a brother on work study at UC Davis, then I’m faced with the choice of asking them to donate their work, not collecting the work at all, or making the case to Campus Purchasing. However, if that same writer is represented by a large publisher or distributor, I can order their work with a few mouse clicks. Libraries simply cannot treat self-publishers like large distributors or publishing houses if they want to have any sort of equitable collection development policy. Many librarians before me have said the same, and it’s wearying that we must continue to repeat it.

Still, my peculiar position as both a self-publishing writer and a librarian has given me insight into the questions and problems that arise when large libraries attempt to collect self-published work. One must work around imperfect policies and ask uncomfortable questions. But examining library policies and bringing colleagues and supervisors into the conversation can help mitigate the confusion.

As for me, I’m anxiously waiting to see how many students check out my novel. If even one student reads and enjoys it, then our decision to collect it will have been the right one.

Comments on Self-Publishing from a Small-Press Publisher

by Rory Litwin (President, Litwin Books, LLC)  http://litwinbooks.com/

A s a small-press publisher in the library field, whose first batch of published books included two that I compiled or authored myself, I have a unique perspective on self-publishing and librarianship. I often work with authors who might consider self-publishing as an option. I also occasionally miss an opportunity to work with an author who chooses to self-publish a work that I respect. More often, however, I work with authors who submit book proposals to us as a part of an effort to “get published” or authors whom we seek out as capable writers to take on projects that we initiate as a publisher. I have acquired some insights into why authors choose one route over the other and can say a few things about our contributions as a publisher that writers should consider when weighing the option to self-publish.

First, I would like to say something candid about how I feel about self-published books in the library field. My attitude toward a given self-published book depends strongly on how good I think that book is or how seriously I take its author as a writer worth reading. If the book is good and I think its author is making a significant contribution, I feel a sense of unease at the implicit threat that my work as a publisher may be unnecessary. I comfort myself by considering what we could have offered this author that he lacks as long as he is “out there on his own,” but the uncomfortable (for us) fact is that self-publishing is a viable alternative for a serious author. Self-publishing is attractive for the author who keenly values absolute independence and is only interested in reaching an audience that is already aware of him. On the other hand, if a book is so bad that we would not have published it or if the self-published book has serious flaws that we would have corrected, I am pleased to see it because it makes an argument by example for the relevance of publishers and induces authors to submit manuscripts to publishers by contributing to the poor image of self-published books. Consequently, the rise of self-publishing and the profusion of articles that encourage self-publishing do not trouble me because the more people are encouraged to self-publish their works, the more bad books will be self-published. This factor helps establish small-press publishers like ourselves as a place for books that deserve to be taken seriously.

Not all serious writers feel a need to prove that their work is good enough to pass through a gatekeeper. For example, Crawford is a self-published writer whose personal reputation makes it unnecessary to seek a publisher’s imprint to establish legitimacy. So with Crawford in mind, along with other authors who might be in his position soon, I will make an argument for the role of publishers in terms of the contributions we make that are not falling away as a result of technologies that facilitate self-publishing. Authors who are considering self-publishing may want to think about the role of publishers in these terms.

To begin, librarians know that their own institutions often regard self-published books less seriously from a collection development perspective. But aside from serving as a gatekeeper to the “realm of legitimately published books,” we also serve, to a certain degree, as a gatekeeper to the structures of bibliographic control and official recognition. Although

continued on page 30
Rumors  
from page 24

Chair of the PASCAL Consortial Purchasing Committee for at least the past seven years! Talk about hard work and dedication! Hooray for Diane who also directs the annual LIBRIS meeting every year. (This year’s meeting was hosted in May by Central Carolina Technical College in Sumter, South Carolina.)
http://www.sclibrar.org/contactinfo.htm
http://pascalsc.org/

And I forgot! I was reading Dennis Brunning’s editorial in the April TCA, “Whither Google?” The editorial is about two Google seminars dealing with Google Search and Google Earth and Google’s future and how it might impact libraries. Colorado State University has apparently archived the seminar in its libguide for Google Search.
http://guides.library.colostate-pueblo.edu/googlesearch

Moving right along, I got distracted. I was going to say that Anurag Achura the lead engineer of Google Scholar who visited us at the Charleston Conference last year is returning as a speaker this year as well! www.katina.info/conference

Was talking to the terrific Joyce Dixon-Fyle <joyfyle@depauw.edu> the other day. Poor thing! Her grandson had a terrible fall and had to have plastic surgery because he cut a gash in his upper lip towards his lower cheek bone! OUCH! Of course he had to be hospitalized. Joyce’s father-in-law (a surgeon) says that plastic surgery on children usually leaves practically no scars. Meanwhile, Joyce had commencement ceremonies to attend as well. Good luck, Joyce, and godspeed to your grandson!

Heard that the energetic Mark Kendall (Senior Vice President of Sales and Operations continued on page 37