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Publishing, Libraries, Publishers, and Librarians: Shared Passions, Complementary Skills

by **Maria Bonn** (Senior Lecturer, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois)
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As I note in the forthcoming book on academic libraries and scholarly publishing (*Getting The Word Out: Academic Libraries and Scholarly Publishing*, **Maria Bonn** and **Mike Furlough**, editors, **ACRL**, forthcoming, 2015), in recent years library publishing activities have drawn increasing attention within the professional world of academic libraries, from the scholars those libraries serve and from established scholarly publishers who seek to assess both opportunities and threats presented by this activity. This work goes by a number of names, with varying connotative values: library publishing, publishing libraries, library publishing services, library publishing support services, and even just publishing. Whatever this work is called, a sufficient number of libraries are engaged in it that when the **Library Publishing Coalition (LPC)**, a collaborative effort to “support the emerging field of library publishing” was formed in 2012, more than fifty college and university libraries paid their membership fees and added their names to the directory. **LPC**’s first Library Publishing Forum, in March 2014, was filled with people engaged with publishing and libraries, eager to share their experiences and their challenges. The 2015 edition of the directory, just released as of this writing, contains 124 entries and represents 56 member libraries. This evidences significant growth in library publishing (both activity and interest) since its emergent years in around the turn of the millennium.

As director of the **University of Michigan**’s Scholarly Publishing Office, founded in 2000, this author was an early entrant into the field of library publishing. In 2001, I organized a panel for the Digital Library Federation (DLF) Forum entitled “Library Approaches to Scholarly Publishing.” The panel was the first of its kind for DLF, and was populated by what I came to call the usual suspects, a group of pioneers, individuals from the institutions that were investing substantially in library publishing (at the time, representatives from **Cornell**’s Project Euclid, **California**’s E-scholarship, and **Columbia**’s CIAO, along with myself from **Michigan**), a group whose members soon found themselves presenting together on many similar panels in a variety of venues. While library publishing raised many interested eyebrows, at the time there were only a handful of libraries actively engaged in and committing resources to publishing. Thirteen years later, at the 2014 DLF forum, we see a panel on “Publishing in Your Library: Defining Purpose, Policies, and Practices” and its description leads with: “Publishing in libraries *seems to be everywhere* (emphasis mine) these days — from university press collaborations to public libraries providing self-publishing services.” Similarly, but in a different context, this author

spoke, again with those same pioneers, at a 2004 **Society of Scholarly Publishing (SSP)** meeting on “What Are Those Libraries Up To and Should We Care?” The room was full, and the audience members, mostly publishers, ranged from curious to skeptical to downright antagonistic about libraries “claiming” to be publishers. In recent years, **SSP** and similar venues, such as the **AAUP** annual meeting, regularly feature sessions on publishing in and from libraries, sessions attended by those eager to learn about and assess both the challenges and the opportunities posed by this growth area of library activity. Indeed, one individual well-placed in **SSP** observed to this author that libraries that publish have become an area of special focus for **SSP** as representing an area of significant potential for membership growth.

At this juncture, it is not difficult to amass evidence that publishing is an area of interest and often investment for many academic libraries (and, in other forms, becoming so for public libraries as well). So it is natural to ask why we see so many libraries entering this space. There are multiple answers to that question, answers that often must be combined to come close to a complete answer. Libraries have, of course, long been intimately connected to publishers and publishing, existing in a relationship of symbiotic need. While the importance to libraries of publisher-as-supplier is evident, what is less often remembered or discussed is the long role of libraries as publisher. Many of the earliest U.S. academic presses got their start in university libraries in the decades surrounding 1900 (see **Paul Courant** and **Elisabeth Jones**, “Scholarly Publishing as an Economic Public Good” forthcoming in *Getting The Word Out: Academic Libraries and Scholarly Publishing*, **ACRL**, 2015). As most of those presses spun off into their own businesses and onto their own recognizance, libraries continued predominantly as consumers rather than producers of publications. But in the last years of the twentieth century, several factors came together to change that. While library publishing certainly has arisen from a mission and service imperative (more on that in a moment), it also comes out of frustrations and dissatisfactions. Certainly libraries are dissatisfied with the high cost of commercial publications and have begun to ask if it might be cheaper to produce publications themselves. Libraries are also frustrated by the intellectual property constraints placed on scholarship by its publishers, constraints that make it difficult to carry out both the work of libraries and the work of the scholars and teachers they serve.

But library publishing is driven by opportunity as much as anxiety. The rise of readily available technology and tools to support publishing, as well as easily accessible business services, has lowered the barrier to entry for many academic libraries and made stepping into the publishing space less daunting than it once appeared. Finally, there has been an increase in user demand and need on academic campuses, demand that service-driven libraries are often eager to meet. Scholars want to publish differently, for economic, principled, and functional reasons. Indeed, much of what scholars are driven to do is communicate, and the marketplace is poorly designed to support this essential function. So they turn to their libraries for help, and libraries are nothing if not eager to help.

Established scholarly publishers of all sorts — commercial, society, and university press — have watched this rise of library publishing with curiosity and consideration, wondering if it represents a new form of competition or new possibilities for collaboration and support. This author once attended a conference session where she heard a highly placed publishing executive assert that publishers exist to “connect users and information,” a sentiment she heard, at a different conference, expressed by the dean of a major research library in exactly those words, substituting libraries for publishers. As one who has spent much time in both libraries and publishing houses and has great fondness and respect for both, I would encourage libraries and publishers not to contend for the role of primary connector and instead recognize their shared interests, passions, and mission and see how they might best work together to further those. Publishing libraries need to learn from publishers, and publishers need to learn from librarians in order to adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing information environment. The collocation and institutional alignment of university libraries and university presses poses a particularly rich opportunity for this exchange of expertise and experience. Both will benefit from exchanging and mutually nurturing their skill sets and experience in training. It is this belief that has given rise to my nascent efforts at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the **University of Illinois** to create a program on “publishing as an information profession” and to develop a cadre of what we at the School informally call “pubrarians.” These pubrarians will be well-placed for employment in the swelling ranks of libraries that are publishing



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and offering publishing services, but they will also be poised and ready to make valuable additions to the staff of other scholarly publishing organizations. Although the ranks of pubrarians to come through my classes are still thin, many of the members look with interest to university presses as a possible place of rewarding employment.

There are a number of things that librarians already do and understand, and that are often a part of a library school education, that prepare them for work in publishing and to fill areas of real need in publishing enterprises. For instance, librarians understand metadata and discoverability tools and methods, an understanding that is increasingly necessary in publishing. Resources must be found to be used (and even purchased). While librarians are often not comfortable with the notion of, and activities associated with, marketing, they do understand how to promote resources and services to users, promotion that could stand publishers in good stead. University presses might particularly benefit from librarian expertise in campus outreach. Librarians have also, as have publishers, taken quickly to the use of social media as an awareness tool for reaching readers and other information resource users.

Librarians pay attention to information economics (cash and otherwise), an attention that could result in valuable conversations with publishers on how to create the most mutually sustainable economic models for publishing. Librarians and presses might particularly enter into dialogue about the alternative, sometimes complementary, economics of mission alignment and market alignment and how

both might shape the ecosystem of scholarly communication.

Librarians are attentive to intellectual property laws and their implications, again fodder for cross-conversation with publishers about rights management that meets the needs of authors, publishers, and consumers. In the academic context this conversation can and should focus on how best to advance the production, distribution, and use of scholarship.

Librarians think about system design and usability for the optimal information experience, a perspective that could increase the value of the publisher products to which it is applied, particularly as publishers immerse themselves ever more deeply in electronic and online delivery of their products.

Librarians pay attention to standards, standards that matter to publishers, ranging from the requirements for archival paper to the more au courant topics of EPUB and XML specifications. Part and parcel of knowing and applying standards is attention to the implications of publication decisions for long-term preservation (which, indeed has been one driver of library publishing). Attending to those implications from the earliest publication stages will position publishers well in creating products with a competitive advantage while ensuring their long-term viability.

It may appear trite to observe that librarians are well trained in conducting what they call the reference interview, but that training stands them in good stead in conversations with authors and editors, in eliciting their goals and needs and matching those to available resources and methods. In many academic libraries, librarians are also experts in subject areas, including the publishing environment of the disciplines for which they are responsible,

an expertise that positions them well to offer authors and other creators editorial guidance. Such guidance might profitably be offered as an alternative to or in support of the work of a university press developmental editor.

Finally, librarians are often veteran project managers. Any publisher who has spent time managing authors, working to publication deadlines, and wrangling with the special combination of authors, production staff, and distribution services can testify that every publication is a project in its own right, requiring both attention and expertise to manage to a successful launch and an established place in the scholarly world.

One can easily imagine (and given space enough and time, this author could easily produce) an inventory of complementary skills that experienced publishers would bring to libraries. Certainly such skills would help ensure the success of publishing libraries. One can even imagine how expertise in such things as marketing, attractive design, and rights agreements (to name just a few areas in which publishers are often conversant) could benefit many areas of library work beyond the emerging work of publishing in libraries.

While this essay intends to underscore the growing scope and range of library publishing activity and suggest the kinds of skills needed for its success, I am also arguing for a productive exchange between libraries and other kinds of scholarly publishers, particularly those from the close academic cousins of libraries in university presses. Through conscious and deliberate sharing and exchange, and through recognition of shared purpose, the two can and will contribute to building an environment that ensures the viability, in the moment and over time, of the scholarly record. 🌱

Three Challenges of Pubrarianship

by **Charles Watkinson** (Associate University Librarian for Publishing, University of Michigan, and Director, U-M Press)
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Scan the “positions vacant” advertisements from the last year and it is clear that an interesting new type of job is emerging in libraries — combining directorship of a university press with senior responsibilities for other scholarly communication activity on campus. Such titles include Executive Director of **Temple University Press** and the Library Officer for Scholarly Communication, Director of **Purdue University Press** and Head of Scholarly Publishing Services (**Purdue Libraries**), Director of **Indiana University Press** and Digital Pub-

lishing, and Director of **University of Michigan Press** and Associate University Librarian for Publishing. In an extreme example (not from the jobs list), the University Librarian at **Oregon State University** has for a number of years also been Director of **Oregon State University Press**.

What these new positions exemplify is a movement not only toward more university presses reporting to libraries (from 14 AAUP members in 2009 to 21 in 2014), but also a trend toward increasing integration of the two entities. Physical collocation of staff with both library and press backgrounds, joint strategic planning exercises, and shared support infrastructure are other characteristics of the most integrated press/library collaborations.

Even where the heads of university presses exploring these opportunities for integration do not hold the sort of joint titles listed above (as at Northwestern, North Texas, Georgia, and Arizona, for example), their roles are changing as they assume greater responsibilities in library administration.

Such integration presents great opportunities (as described elsewhere in this issue of *Against the Grain*), but it also creates challenges for the leaders of these merged entities — exemplars of the new role of “pubrarian” so named by **John Unsworth** (now occupying the equally merged role of Vice Provost, University Librarian, and CIO at **Brandeis University**). Having occupied two of the positions above over the last few years, first at **Purdue University** and now at the **University of Michigan**, three particular areas of challenge have emerged for me.

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