

2016

Monograph Publishing in the Digital Age

Donald J. Waters

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, DJW@Mellon.org

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Waters, Donald J. (2018) "Monograph Publishing in the Digital Age," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 28: Iss. 3, Article 9.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.7355>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

book publishing, falling readership,²⁶ and the precarious role of the arts and humanities in contemporary society.²⁷ Moreover, the drive to “publish or perish,” the increasing speed of research, and the focus on quantified assessment processes are not conducive to reflection and long-form writing.

As **Tim O’Reilly** said in 2007, publishing is “about knowledge dissemination, learning, entertainment, codification of subject authority.”²⁸ The book is one of many formats that facilitate making knowledge “public,” but not the only one. In the scholarly context, the use of microblogging, blogging and other forms

of digital communication has increased the speed of research and spread of ideas, but at the same time has limited its “chronological reach”²⁹ due to the ephemerality of some digital media. The use of digital media also affected the meaning of content and its impact, as exemplified by McLuhan’s statement “the medium is the message,”³⁰ by encouraging focus on minutiae, specialisation and topicality, and a lack of in-depth reflection. Moreover, electronic media encourage skimming and dipping in and out, affecting the reader’s engagement with content.

While the monograph may no longer be the dominant medium in the transmission of knowledge, I argue that it remains a keystone species in the scholarly communication ecosystem and its survival is vital for the future of

scholarship. As **John Willinsky** states:

The monograph provides researchers with the finest of stages for sustained and comprehensive — sometimes exhaustive and definitive — acts of scholarly inquiry. A monograph is what it means to work out an argument in full, to marshal all the relevant evidence, to provide a complete account of consequences and implications, as well as counter-arguments and criticisms. It might well seem — to risk a little hyperbole — that if the current academic climate fails to encourage scholars and researchers to turn to this particular device for thinking through a subject in full, it reduces the extent and coherence of what we know of the world.³¹ 🐼

Monograph Publishing in the Digital Age: A View from the Mellon Foundation

by **Donald J. Waters** (Senior Program Officer, Scholarly Communications Program, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation)
<djw@mellon.org>

Abstract: In 2013 the Mellon Foundation’s Scholarly Communications program began focusing on how to incorporate modern digital practices into monograph publication of scholarship in the humanities. Mellon is committed to support all stakeholders — faculty, their institutions, the university presses — in setting up a new regime of long-form monographic publishing that best suits not only their demands, but the demands of new generations of digital readers.



ities? Is publication in the humanities destined to follow the journals model, which amounts to little more than highly priced, print-derived articles in the Portable Document Format that take advantage of few, if any, of the interactive, annotative, and computational affordances of the Web? Shouldn’t scholars and publishers in the humanities address the core issue, which the humanities deans expressed as a profound concern that higher education is failing to reach its core audiences in the online media they are naturally using? Isn’t it time to broaden our view of scholarly publication to include other forms of publication, including monographs?

New Infrastructure for Long-form Publication

The **Andrew W. Mellon Foundation** is a New York-based private philanthropy that supports higher education and the arts. The **Mellon** program that I lead is Scholarly Communications, which supports academic libraries and scholarly publishers. One of our objectives in the Scholarly Communications program is to help incorporate modern digital practices into the publication of scholarship in the humanities and ensure its dissemination to the widest possible audience.

In 2013 we began focusing on long-form research publications in the humanities, and particularly the monograph. As a result of this process, we created a working set of the features of the monograph of the future as we heard it described in our meetings across the country:

1. Fully interactive and searchable online with primary sources and other works;
2. High quality as judged by peers;
3. Portable across reader applications;
4. Able to support a user’s annotations independently of any particular reader technology;
5. Capable of supporting metrics of use that respect user privacy;
6. Reviewed and eligible for disciplinary prizes and awards;
7. Maintained and preserved in its digital form;
8. Expertly marketed, widely accessible, and able to be owned (not rented) by the reader; and
9. Economically sustainable

In 2014, my Mellon colleague, **Helen Cullyer**, and I sat in on a roundtable discussion of deans of humanities divisions in about 25 research universities in the U.S. Of the questions that occupied them, one directly concerned the future of the monograph. Wondering how they could make the humanities more interesting to their students, the deans observed that the present generation is immersed in the interactive web of multimedia to a degree that makes it harder for them to appreciate the book-based humanistic traditions.

The Value of Publication in the Humanities

As they wrestled with this key question, the deans explored several aspects of a much larger issue: How do universities best shape the formation, interpretation, and dissemination of knowledge to emerging public needs and media? What features define the quality of scholarly argument? If the monograph is increasingly being challenged as a viable component of systems of scholarly communications, what other genres are needed to disseminate knowledge in the humanities?

For the last 20 years, nearly all the conversation about change in scholarly communications has rather monotonously focused on serials. This discussion has been dominated by the need for open access with its pedantic debates about the meaning of the colors of gold and green. Proliferating funder and university mandates require the development of costly institutional structures of notification and compliance monitoring, and are resulting in guerrilla wars of evasion among various segments of the faculty, who may have even voted for the mandates on their campuses, but believe that they do not — or should not — apply to themselves.

Are these the topics of the conversation that members of the academy really want to be having about scholarly communications in the human-

continued on page 18

Rich, challenging, and substantive as this list of features may be, note that it does not include open access as a defining feature. The **Mellon Foundation** strongly supports open access, and believes that it will play an important role in how its vision of the monograph of the future is achieved, but open access is one of the means to the ends we envisioned, not an end in itself.

Some pieces of this vision are well within reach. For example, a series of **Mellon**-funded experiments on digital annotation eventually led to the Open Annotation standard of the World Wide Web Consortium, which is now being widely implemented by the Hypothesis Project and others.¹ However, other pieces are missing and there are many points of resistance. This is not just because no one is interested in change. Rather, the system is large, entrenched, and complex and so there is no reliable single lever of change. Moreover, as **John Maxwell** of **Simon Fraser University** has observed in response to our request to review **Mellon's** approach to this complicated system, the inward-facing importance of the monograph as a credential has often overshadowed the outward-facing features of the monograph, which are intended to promulgate broad understanding of humanities research. **Mellon** is embracing the institutional and market-building dimensions of change required in a multi-pronged, multi-year funding initiative. So far, in a little over a year, the **Foundation** has made 21 grants in this initiative totaling more than \$10 million.

Quantity and Costs

The **Foundation** started this initiative with two baseline questions. How many monographs are produced and what are the costs of monograph publishing. The question of how many is a measure of significance. **Joseph Esposito** explored this question for us, navigating the difficult definitional question of what is a monograph. For practical reasons, we excluded the output of commercial publishers, as well as **Oxford** and **Cambridge**. We also limited the survey to American university presses, and found that they publish approximately 3,000 monographs per year. By any measure, this is a significant number of works that add to the base of humanities scholarship each year. We have built on these data by asking **OCLC** to match the ISBNs to its holdings records and are now creating a profile of library purchases in the humanities fields, by the LC class number in which the books are published.

In 2014, **ITHAKA S+R** began working with 20 university presses to establish the costs of monograph publishing, which prove substantial. The **University of California Press** in its Luminos Open Access initiative quotes a baseline cost of \$15,000.² **Raym Crow** in his study for the **Association of American Universities** and **Association of Research Libraries** estimated the average cost at \$20,000 per book.³ In a recently published **Mellon**-funded study, the university presses at Indiana and Michigan put the average costs respectively at \$26,700 and \$27,600.⁴ The Ithaka cost study attempts to get at full costs of the first digital file; that is, excluding the costs of printing and distribution of print copies, but including marketing and overhead. The study reports average costs ranging from \$30,000 per book for the group of the smallest university presses to more than \$49,000 per book for the group of the largest presses. These are costs for monograph publication only; the costs of innovative long-form genres that are non-linear, data-intensive, or multimedia rich are still not yet well understood. These cost estimates are sobering: 3,000 books a year at an average per book cost of \$30,000 yields a total cost of approximately \$90 million in the U.S. alone.

How are these costs to be afforded in a new regime of long-form monographic publishing? Can the need to advance scholarship be reconciled with the need to drive down the costs of both monograph and other long-form publication to affordable levels? Let's look at these questions from the perspective of the faculty, the university, the presses, and the reader.

The Faculty

Mellon staff have been visiting campuses for consultations with faculty about the future of scholarly publishing since early 2014. Some

faculty see no problem with the current system, others clearly would welcome support of a new regime, including those who want to work on digital projects, or want the means to produce publications that can only be accomplished digitally. However, a primary concern of faculty is how high-quality digital monographs would be assessed for promotion and tenure.

As part of its publishing initiative, the **Mellon Foundation** followed the lead of the **Modern Language Association**, which has long-established guidelines for the evaluation of digital scholarship, and supported the development of similar principles at the two other two largest scholarly societies, the **American Historical Association** and the **College Art Association** (in partnership with the **Society of Architectural Historians**).⁵ While it is clear that disciplinary guidelines have their force, institutional and departmental guidelines are even more important, and this brings us to the role of universities and colleges.

Universities and Colleges

Universities and colleges have substantial interests in promoting their faculty and in the fields they represent. Sponsorship of publication could translate institutional interests into first-class digital products, representing a sustainable source of income for long-form scholarly publishing in the future. There are two lines of thought that universities are currently exploring: a direct pay-to-publish model as one way of funding monograph publishing, and a slightly less direct model in which there is an on-campus agent who assists in developmental editing and in placing works with presses.

With support from **Mellon**, the universities at Indiana, Michigan, and Emory have walked through a model in which institutions would sponsor and pay to publish the works of at least some of the monographs their faculty produce.⁶ The essence of the model is as follows:

1. Presses recruit authors and review the quality of their publications through normal means.
2. Institutions select authors to participate in a pay-to-publish model; authors could decline and pursue traditional forms of publication.
3. For a negotiated price that the selected author's institution would pay, the press produces a well-designed digital publication that it would:
 - a. Deposit in at least one trusted preservation repository with full metadata;
 - b. Make available online under an agreed-upon Creative Commons license;
 - c. Market through social media, and
 - d. Submit for disciplinary prizes and awards.
4. Presses could also sell derivative works to other markets (print on demand, or in **Amazon** formats) or generate new services for sale to generate additional income.

The three institutions each deemed the pay-to-publish model to be feasible. Michigan and Emory are now following up with plans to draft model contracts between the university and the author, the author and the press, and the university and press.

The idea of a campus agent and other means of institutional support for digital book production are being explored with **Mellon** support at **Brown University**, and at the **Universities of Connecticut** and **Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**.⁷ These experiments promise to challenge and compete with the university press book acquisition process, one of the more costly and opaque activities identified in the Ithaka study.

The Presses

I turn now to the question of the capacity within the university presses. With the help of subcontractors, most are already capable of producing eBook versions of print monographs. But how are they addressing the needs of natively digital readers in a competitive environment that, over time, drives down costs? To help answer

continued on page 20

this question, I have space only to list briefly some of the activities now being undertaken with Mellon support:

- **Michigan Publishing** (with presses at Indiana, Minnesota, Northwestern, and Pennsylvania State) is developing a Hydra/Fedora platform for disseminating and preserving digital monographs and their associated media content.⁸
- The **University of Minnesota Press**, in collaboration with the **City University of New York**, is developing tools and workflows for publishing iterative scholarly monographs, in which works remain dynamic by means of the ongoing interaction between author and reader.⁹
- The **Stanford University Press** and **Stanford University Library** are developing peer review, editorial, publication, and preservation workflows for “interactive scholarly works;” that is long-form, born-digital publications that depend on the interactive features of the Web to link interpretive scholarship to related secondary sources, primary source evidence, visualizations, and software tools.¹⁰
- The **New York University Libraries and Press** are creating a discovery and reading interface.¹¹

The Reader

Now let me conclude with simply a gesture toward the most important ingredient in this complex mix, namely the reader. All of the ambitious and creative activity that I have described has originated mainly on the producer side of the author-reader interaction. The work of the faculty, the universities and colleges, and the presses is worthwhile if and only if a market is created in which readers find and read the works of knowledge that are produced. The most important question, which the humanities’ deans raised in their discussion that I described at the beginning of this article, is: What makes for an active reader in the digital age? Exploring the answer to this question still lies before us as largely virgin territory. We have an enormous amount of work to do. 🌱

Endnotes

1. The Open Annotation Collaboration, <http://www.openannotation.org/>. The Hypothesis project, <https://hypothes.is/>.
2. The **University of California Press**, “Luminos,” http://www.luminosoa.org/site/for_authors/.
3. **Raym Crowe**, “AAU/ARL Prospectus for an institutionally funded First-book Subvention,” June 2014, <http://www.arl.org/storage/documents/publications/aau-arl-prospectus-for-institutionally-funded-first-book-subvention-june2014.pdf>.
4. **James Hilton, Carolyn Walters, et al.** “A Study of Direct Author Subvention for Publishing Humanities Books at Two Universities: A Report to the **Andrew W. Mellon Foundation** by **Indiana University** and **University of Michigan**,” September 15, 2015, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/113671>.
5. **Seth Dembo**, “AHA Publishes Guidelines for Evaluation of Digital Scholarship,” September 9, 2015, <http://blog.historians.org/2015/09/aha-publishes-guidelines-evaluation-of-digital-scholarship/>. **College Art Association**, “CAA and SAH Release Guidelines for the Evaluation of Digital Scholarship in Art and Architectural History,” February 23, 2016, <http://www.collegeart.org/news/2016/02/23/the-college-art-association-and-the-society-of-architectural-historians-release-guidelines-for-the-evaluation-of-digital-scholarship-in-art-and-architectural-history/>.
6. **Michael Elliott**, “The Future of the Monograph in the Digital Age: A Report to The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation,” *Journal of Electronic Publishing* 18:4, 2015, <https://pid.emory.edu/ark:/25593/q4fd0>. **Hilton, et al.**, “A Study of Direct Author Subvention.”
7. **Brown University**, “Mellon grant to fund digital scholarship initiative,” <https://news.brown.edu/articles/2015/01/digital>. **University of Connecticut**, “Mellon Award Establishes Scholarly Communications Design Studio as Part of Digital Publishing Initiative,” <http://humanities.uconn.edu/2015/12/09/uconn-news-release-mellon-award-establishes-scholarly-communications-design-studio-as-part-of-digital-publishing-initiative/>. **University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**, “\$1 million Mellon grant to help humanities scholars explore digital publishing options,” <https://www.lis.illinois.edu/articles/2015/10/1-million-mellon-grant-help-humanities-scholars-explore-digital-publishing-options>.
8. **Michigan Publishing**, “Hydra/Fedora Mellon Project,” <http://www.publishing.umich.edu/projects/hydra/>.
9. **University of Minnesota Press**, “The University of Minnesota Press partners with CUNY’s GC Digital Scholarship Lab to launch Manifold Scholarship — a platform for iterative, networked monographs — with grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation,” <https://www.upress.umn.edu/press/press-releases/manifold-scholarship>.
10. **Stanford University Libraries**, “Stanford University Press Awarded \$1.2 Million for the Publishing of Interactive Scholarly Works,” <http://library.stanford.edu/news/2015/01/stanford-university-press-awarded-12-million-publishing-interactive-scholarly-works>.
11. **New York University**, “NYU Libraries, NYU Press Lead Project to Develop Innovative Open Access Monographs,” <http://www.nyu.edu/about/news-publications/news/2015/06/05/nyu-libraries-nyu-press-lead-project-to-develop-innovative-open-access-monographs.html>.

Rumors

from page 8

on August 1st. In the interim, her personal email is <salisbury.leila@gmail.com>. One aspect of her new position is that the press at **UK** reports through the libraries, so **Leila** will have an even better opportunity to connect with the library world! Fodder for more columns!

I understand from **Leila** that the **AAUP** has formally launched a new set of “best practice” recommendations for peer review. **Mick Jeffries**, who was on the **AAUP** editorial committee and who helped put together the guidelines plans to do a column about the guidelines and the process of developing them. Watch for it in **September**.
<http://www.aaupnet.org/resources/for-members/handbooks-and-tool-kits/peer-review-best-practices>

Moving right along, the **University Press of Florida** announces that **Linda Bathgate** joins the Press on July 1 as **Editor in Chief** and **Deputy Director**. **Bathgate** comes to **UPF** from **Routledge**, a division of **Taylor & Francis**, where she is Publisher in Communication. For over a decade she developed journals as well as books for communication and writing, composition, and rhetoric disciplines at **Lawrence Erlbaum Associates**, prior to their acquisition by **Taylor & Francis**.

Bathgate is a member of **Pace University’s Master of Science in Publishing Advisory Board**. **Bathgate** will lead **UPF’s** book division and burgeoning journals program. She will be acquiring for the press’s robust regional gardening list and coordinating an expansion into earth sciences. **Meredith Morris-Babb** is Director of **UPF**. This search was handled by the awesome **Jack Farrell & Associates**. upress.ufl.edu

How about the print book and the scholarly monograph? This issue of **ATG** (June) is ably edited by the gorgeous **Colleen Campbell** (**Ithaca**, once at **Casalini Libri**) and the astute **Adriaan van der Weel**. They convince us that the print book is far from dead!

Noteworthy! The **Rare Book School** has received a \$1 million gift from philanthropist **Jay T. Last**. This donation, the single largest in the School’s history, is to be used over the next four years to “strengthen the School for the future,” as **Mr. Last** wrote in a letter accompanying the gift. The funds from **Mr. Last’s** benefaction will be used to improve and expand **Rare Book School** programs, and to increase the School’s visibility, sustainability, and impact over the long term. “After carefully studying our organization, **Jay** has chosen to make a philanthropic investment in the future success of **RBS’s** educational mission,” said **Rare Book School Director Michael F. Suarez, S.J.**
<http://rarebookschool.org/news/gift-received/>

continued on page 26