

Responding to the Challenges Facing Scholarly Communication

The Case of Scholarly Book Publishing

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Discussion Statement

The scholarly book is in peril. The history and causes of the crisis are complex, but the effect is straightforward: in many fields opportunities for publishing scholarly books, including specialized monographs, have become scarce, even as they remain critically important to scholarly communication and a requirement for scholarly advancement. Analysis, planning, and action to address these problems must become a shared priority of authors, universities, and publishers.

The Academic Senate calls upon its own and other faculty authors, university administrators, libraries, commercial publishers, and university presses to:

1. Experiment with new publishing models that fully leverage scholarly editorial expertise and digital technologies;
2. Collaborate to make best use of each other's strengths while maximizing the efficient dissemination of scholarship;
3. Pursue and expand indicators of scholarly quality that acknowledge the continuing value of the printed format, but remove it as a tacit requirement for acceptable scholarship;
4. Rethink how university resources for book publishing are distributed; and
5. Provide subventions for non-tenured faculty to assist in the publication of appropriately peer reviewed, high quality scholarship.

Background

The University of California faculty, along with academic colleagues throughout the world, are growing increasingly concerned about reduced and lost opportunities to share the results of research and scholarship for the progress of knowledge. The crisis involves all forms of scholarly publishing, but is especially acute for monographic works and for university presses, where declining sales are forcing presses to publish many fewer specialized monographs even though monographs remain essential for disseminating knowledge and establishing credentials in most humanities and many social science disciplines. There is no lack of diagnoses of the problem, which variously have analyzed the effect of high-priced databases and science journals on library budgets, increasing disciplinary specialization leading to smaller markets, decreasing subsidies for presses, and the changing demographics of higher education itself.¹

Diagnosis must now be complemented by systemic and strategic efforts to directly address the problems. As in other sectors of scholarly communication, the participants in scholarly book publishing must adopt values, practices, and partnerships that lead to equitable, sustainable, and flexible scholarly publishing that is well matched to the needs of academe.

Values and Practice

1. **Experiment with new publishing models that fully leverage scholarly editorial expertise and digital technologies.** Because the status quo is not working, we must analyze and experimentally reconfigure the components of book publishing. We encourage, for example,

¹ See, for example, Davidson, Cathy N., *Understanding the Economic Burden of Scholarly Publishing*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 3, 2003; Greenblatt, Stephen, *A Special Letter from Stephen Greenblatt [to the MLA]*, May 28, 2002. http://www.mla.org/scholarly_pub ; and McPherson, James, *A Crisis in Scholarly Publishing*, *Perspectives* [American Historical Association], October, 2003. <http://www.historians.org/Perspectives/Issues/2003/0310/0310pre1.cfm>.

experiments in journal-like distributed editing, and digital-first peer reviewed publication followed by print-on-demand. Moreover, we advocate for a move away from book/journal and print/digital dichotomies, toward approaches that produce high quality scholarship in a variety of formats for a range of audiences.

2. **Collaborate to make best use of each other's strengths while maximizing the efficient dissemination of scholarship.** Faculty, libraries, and scholarly book publishers must collaborate to make best use of each entity's strengths, leverage work that is already being done, and use the university's financial resources most efficiently. We encourage creative partnerships, such as the one between the California Digital Library (CDL) and UC Press, which is creating book series that are managed by faculty editorial boards, uses the CDL's eScholarship repository for digital publication, and leverages the Press's printing and marketing services.
3. **Expand and pursue indicators of scholarly quality that acknowledge the continuing value of the printed format, but remove it as a tacit requirement for acceptable scholarship.** The distinction between print and digital is blurring. Because print-on-demand technology makes it possible and cost effective to produce high quality print versions of rigorously reviewed digital-first or digital-only publications, print publication is no longer a meaningful surrogate for peer review and quality of imprint. Of course here, as elsewhere in scholarly publishing, peer review and other quality control policies and processes must be disclosed.² However, publication format need not be an issue in the dissemination of scholarship.
4. **Rethink how university resources for monograph publishing are distributed.** Direct and indirect support for scholarly book publishing – historically including library book purchases, direct and indirect support to the university press, and scholars' editing services, among others – needs to be considered within the overall rapidly evolving scholarly communication environment. The need to rethink support arises from factors such as: a) rapid changes in other sectors that affect book publishing, as when escalating journal prices constrain library book purchasing power; b) the need to encourage innovations called for above, such as library-press publishing partnerships; and c) calls for direct economic action, such as "first book" subventions to support non-tenured faculty. We urge an evaluation of the support needed to evolve healthy monograph publishing that takes into account the university's overall role in scholarly communication, and the implied cost sources, centers, and totals.
5. **Provide subventions for non-tenured faculty to assist in the publication of appropriately peer reviewed, high quality scholarship.** An effective form of university support is subventions to authors which can be applied to initial publication costs at an appropriate, post peer review, point in production.³ Subventions, including as startup packages for new non-tenured faculty, have analogs in the sciences, are well tested and well used in much of academe, and, in aggregate, will help ease the economic dysfunctions in university and scholarly press publishing.

² As suggested, for example, in the companion to this whitepaper titled *Responding to the Challenges Facing Scholarly Communication: Evaluation of Publications in Academic Personnel Processes* <http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/senate/committees/scsc/cap.eval.scsc.12.05.pdf>.

³ See *Ibid.*