

University-based Publishing Partnerships: A Guide to Critical Issues

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Digital information technologies and ubiquitous networking have introduced a fundamental conceptual shift in scholarly and scientific communication. This changing environment has led university libraries to redefine their roles, and the services they provide, to better serve the research and teaching needs of their institutions. As a result, many university libraries have broadened their missions to launch online publishing programs that explore new models for scholarly communication.

The advent of digital publishing has also exerted pressure on university presses, traditionally the principal channels for university-based publishing. As they have struggled in a difficult market, university presses have been criticized for failing to exploit the benefits of online publishing models. Yet such criticism often ignores the constraints under which the presses operate, including a financial model that typically requires them to recover over 90% of their costs, and — more significantly — the expectations of their host institutions, indeed of the entire academy, that they continue to fulfill their traditional roles as publishers of original scholarly monographs.

As their roles continue to evolve, the boundaries separating the publishing activities of the library and the press have become less distinct. It is not surprising then that the potential for libraries and university presses to cooperate in creating new digital publishing channels — aligned with the research and teaching missions of their host institutions and capable of contributing to a transinstitutional publishing system — is receiving increasing attention.

While their respective missions — one centered on the research and teaching needs of the host institution, the other serving the academy as a whole — differ in significant ways, libraries and presses recognize the need to address fundamental problems in the current system of scholarly publishing, and understand the interdependence of their organizations in achieving a solution. Active collaboration can use the mission tension between libraries and presses to drive a shared exploration of alternative publishing models, an exploration that coordinates their own interests with those of other stakeholders — most notably, their institution's faculty and administration.

In many institutions, the library and the press are taking the lead in developing collaborative publishing ventures intended to demonstrate the potential of integrated, university-based publishing strategies. However, despite the commitment of many libraries and presses to launching digital publishing partner-

ships, such collaborations confront issues that limit their progress and slow their evolution. These issues include:

- Establishing governance and administrative structures that integrate the core competencies and resources of libraries and presses, without disrupting the broader objectives of either;
- Identifying funding models that accommodate the disparate financial objectives, incentives, and missions of libraries and presses;
- Defining the partnership's objectives to align the vertical, institution-specific mission of the library with the horizontal, transinstitutional mission of the press;
- Determining what services to provide, based on the current and future scholarly communication and publishing needs of the institution's faculty and researchers; and
- Demonstrating the value of the collaboration to university administrators in order to secure resources and long-term support.

As the number of publishing initiatives based on library-press partnerships continues to grow, addressing the issues above becomes increasingly important to advance the exploration of university-based publishing models. To help libraries, presses, and other university units establish effective publishing partnerships, **SPARC** (the **Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition**) has developed *Campus-based Publishing Partnerships: A Guide to Critical Issues*.

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About the SPARC Guide

SPARC intends its guide to help university library and press staff charged with launching a publishing collaboration by providing practical guidance on defining and structuring the partnership and on establishing explicit strategic and financial objectives to guide its operation. **SPARC's** sponsorship of the guide is motivated by two assumptions: (1) that a well-conceived publishing partnership can deliver real benefits to the library, the press, and their host institution; and (2) that a library-press partnership may not always provide the most effective response to a university publishing need. In the former case, the guide will help libraries and presses realize the potential benefits of collaboration; in the latter, it should save institutions time and resources that might otherwise be expended on ill-defined, if well-intentioned, attempts to partner.

To help institutions negotiate the issues relevant to building sound and balanced publishing partnerships, the **SPARC** guide

reviews current library-press initiatives, describes the potential benefits of partnerships, and provides an overview of the financial and operating criteria for launching and sustaining a successful collaboration. In addition, it provides practical guidance on defining and structuring a publishing partnership, including case studies that exemplify key concepts. This article provides a brief overview of the issues that the **SPARC** guide addresses. The complete *Campus-based Publishing Partnerships: A Guide to Critical Issues* is available at <http://www.arl.org/sparc>.

Current Library-Press Initiatives

To provide context and perspective for prospective partners, the **SPARC** guide provides a typology of library-press partnerships and an overview of current initiatives. An analysis of current publishing collaborations identified ongoing collaborations at twenty-six institutions, involving approximately forty individual projects. About two-thirds of the existing initiatives are between a university press and a library, while the remaining third involve other partners, including academic departments, university computing centers, or scholarly societies. The guide reviews the types of collaborations currently undertaken, including:

Backfile Digitization Projects

About one-fifth of the collaborations involve digitizing a subset of a press's backlist and making the texts available online via a library server. Most of these projects provide access to out-of-print or low-sales backlist titles, with the remainder focusing on titles in a specific subject area or in support of an academic program. The **University of California's eScholarship Editions** provides an example of the former; examples of the latter include **Cornell University's Race and Religion Web Portal** and the **Georgetown University Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics**.

Library Online Provision of Press Print Titles and Supplements

Another fifth of the collaborations entail the library providing an online version of a current press print publication. Unlike the digital backlist projects, these initiatives provide online access to current titles or expand the coverage or functionality of the print volume. For example, **Times of Sorrow and Hope**, from the **Pennsylvania State University Press**, supplements the one hundred fifty photographs in the print edition with more than six thousand online photographs from the library's collection.

Press Distribution of Library-sponsored Content

In another fifth of the collaborations, the press provides marketing and print distribu-

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tion services for content created, sponsored, or controlled by the library. These initiatives include traditional distribution arrangements, such as the **University of Southern Illinois Press's** publication of *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*; reprint series, such as **Penn State's Metalmark Books**; and monograph series that mine a library's collections, such as the *Fontanus Monograph Series*, published by the **McGill-Queen's University Press**.

Digital Research and Reference Services

Collaborations that create digital research or reference services represent another fifth of the existing initiatives. Most of these services represent thematic collections that bring together primary and secondary literature. Examples of such services include: *The Lexicon of Early Modern English*, from the **University of Toronto**; *The Middle English Compendium*, from the **University of Michigan**; the *Bible in Dutch Culture Project*, from the **University of Amsterdam**; and the *Mark Twain Project*, from the **University of California**.

Online Publishing Platforms

Libraries and presses at several institutions have partnered to provide digital publishing platforms — sometimes with support for a print component — for journals or books. These initiatives include: *Érudit*, a collaboration of the **Universities of Laval**, Montreal, and Quebec, which supports the digital production of both books and journals; **Johns Hopkins University's Project Muse**; the **University of California's Global, Area, and International Archive (GAIA)** publications program; and *Project Euclid*, now a partnership of the **Cornell University Libraries** and the **Duke University Press**.

Funding models for existing publishing collaborations include mixed models that combine subsidies and earned revenue (almost 60%), comprehensive development and operating subsidies (a third), and earned revenue models with no subsidy component (about 10%). Of the 90% of the projects that have received some level of subvention, approximately 60% have enjoyed both development and ongoing operating subsidies, while the remaining 40% received support for initial development alone.

Benefits of Publishing Partnerships

Partnering can benefit libraries and presses in a variety of ways, and the **SPARC** guide describes the types of benefits collaborative partnerships can deliver and the manner in which those benefits can support each partner's operating strategy. If a partnership is not recognized as central to each partner's strategy, it will be unlikely to gain the commitment and resources it needs to succeed. Several broad benefits will motivate many university-based publishing partnerships; these include:

- **Gaining access to resources that advance each organization's mission**

A partnership may seek to develop a digital publishing capacity that requires resources beyond those of either the press or the library individually. A collaboration can combine competencies, technical expertise, and financial resources to provide services beyond the capabilities of the organizations acting independently.

- **Realizing cost efficiencies via economies of scale or scope**

Partnerships can allow both libraries and presses to gain economies of scale by combining programs to serve their constituents' needs efficiently. In instances where the library has already launched its own publishing program, collaboration can help the organizations cut costs by eliminating duplicative processes and programs or by increasing the efficiency of existing programs.

- **Increasing each organization's ability to generate institutional support and funding**

Besides combining expertise and resources, collaborations allow the partners to increase their visibility, effectiveness, and political position within their institution. Whether this visibility derives from an expanded sphere of activity, or from improved credibility through cost savings, an enhanced image within the institution can translate into greater funding that allows each partner to pursue its mission more effectively.

In practice, the library and the press will each need to determine the value of the partnership in the context of its specific mission and strategic objectives. The sustainability of the collaboration will ultimately rest on the value that it creates for each partner and for the host institution; therefore, the value that the collaboration intends to create needs to be explicitly identified and thoroughly assessed.

Reconciling Financial Models

Libraries and university presses share much in common: both operate on a nonprofit model and each seeks, in its own way, to fulfill a mission consonant with that of its host institution. However, there are real differences in the financial structures and operating strategies of libraries and presses, and these must be reconciled to allow a partnership between them to realize its full potential. If these differences are not explicitly recognized and accommodated, the library may not consider its mission objectives to be adequately served, or the press may not be in a financial position to commit significant resources to a sustained collaborative publishing program. In such cases, collaborative activity would lack the full commitment of both partners, and the scale, scope, and duration of collaborative projects would be limited.

While libraries are funded by institutional standing budgets, university presses generate most or all of their operating budgets through earned revenue from market activities and must manage their activities overall to balance mission fulfillment and revenue generation. For

presses and libraries to partner successfully requires a funding model and financial structure that allows the press to participate without diverting resources from other mission-critical publishing programs. Recognizing the requirements of the press's funding model allows a collaboration to channel subsidies and/or create hybrid revenue-subsidy models that permit the press to participate fully in the partnership.

In many current partnerships, the library and the press implement parallel business models, with the library subsidizing its participation and the press applying a revenue-generating market model. This approach allows each partner to evaluate its participation in the partnership using the same financial approach with which it manages its other activities. However, when market revenue expands a partnership's capacity to achieve its mission, the partners will often find an integrated model — wherein each shares in the financial risk and reward — more effective for achieving the initiative's objectives.

Utility of Business Principles

The aggressive market practices of some commercial journal publishers have tainted the perception of market-based publishing models for many in the academy. However, business processes and market models do have relevance and utility for university-based publishing collaborations. Regardless of whether it uses a subsidy or earned-revenue model, a partnership can benefit from the market orientation that a press brings to the partnership.

University-based publishing collaborations should couple the feedback mechanisms and performance stimulants of market participation with the value-driven goal of mission attainment. While complete reliance on the market and on earned revenue would expose a university-based collaboration to forces that may not align well with its mission and values, ignoring market forces sacrifices the discipline that market participation requires. Insulation from market forces, such as user demand and competitive alternatives, can reduce the relevance and mission value of a partnership's output, lower its operating efficiency, and result in the suboptimal use of resources, even when a partnership operates solely for the benefit of a specific university community.

The Potential of Publishing Partnerships

Balancing the differences — operational, financial, and mission-related — between a press, a library, and other university units can make effective partnering complex. However, addressing these differences constructively as part of a collaborative process will contribute significantly to the strength, creativity, and value of such partnerships. In terms of transformative change to university-based publishing, collaborations that bring together a press and a library hold promise largely because each partner has a discrete perspective on a common problem.

Library-press partnerships can give the academy greater control over the intellectual

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products that it helps create. To realize this potential, however, publishing partnerships will need to evolve from informal working alliances to long-term, programmatic collaborations that involve considerable interdependence and a shared strategic vision. Such partnerships can be productive, lasting, and transformative. However, to succeed in the long-term, partnerships must effectively balance the interests of all the parties, and that balance requires considerable effort to establish and maintain. **SPARC** hopes that its guide will provide practical guidance to help libraries and presses achieve that balance and define robust partnerships capable of supporting innovative approaches to university-based publishing. 