

Purposeful Collaboration for Research Libraries and University Presses



by **Michael J. Furlough** (Assistant Dean for Scholarly Communication, Co-director Office of Digital Scholarly Publishing, The Pennsylvania State University Library)
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Collaboration is king. It's a value, a benefit, an answer to limited resources, a carrot on a stick, or, if it doesn't go well, sometimes it's just the stick. Librarians in particular value collaboration, and naturally so. Libraries are in the sharing business, and some of their most important infrastructure (interlibrary lending, cataloging) depends upon cooperative, cross-institutional work. In my library's recent strategic planning efforts, our brainstorming sessions frequently brought forth numerous calls for collaboration (sometimes without a clear objective — but that's what brainstorming is for).

University presses provide an interesting counterpoint. Presses do form business partnerships and collaborate in professional ways through the **Association of American University Presses**. But in general they understand each other as potential competitors for sales and manuscripts, not as resource sharers. In spring 2007 the **Andrew W. Mellon Foundation** announced a call for proposals to support collaboratively-based university press publishing for first time authors in underserved fields. That call ultimately yielded four very interesting collaborative publication efforts involving over a dozen presses, focused in the fields of Slavic Studies, American Literatures, South Asian Studies, and Ethnomusicology (see <http://www.aaupnet.org/news/press/mellon12008.html>). One story circulating, perhaps apocryphal, has it that the first reaction among many in the community involved collective head-scratching: Collaborate? What do you mean? True or not, it's a useful reminder that collaboration requires a habit of mind. When two parties begin to explore how to work together it takes time and effort to establish trust. Both will be operating on new turf, territory might be redrawn, and the discussion has to move through a focus on threats to a focus on trade-offs that establish mutual benefits.

It's much easier to talk about collaboration and its potential benefits than to actually engage in it. The authors of this set of essays on library-university press collaborations know this well. **Patrick Alexander** and I are grateful to *Against the Grain* for the opportunity to guest edit this issue on the benefits and practicalities of library-publisher collaborations. Attendees of the November 2008 **Charleston Conference** had a chance to preview some of these essays during our panel discussion "Strategies and Mechanics of Collaboration." We especially want to thank our contributors, each of whom brings a unique case study to highlight the many different routes these activities may take.

We have heard much about these types of efforts in the past few years. 2007's report from Ithaka, "University Publishing in a

Digital Age," which initially began as a study of University Presses and their futures, grew to encompass a wider range of publishing activities, including those based in libraries, and outlined the potential benefits of working together (<http://www.ithaka.org/strategic-services/Ithaka%20University%20Publishing%20Report.pdf>). **Karla Hahn's** report for the **Association of Research Libraries**, *Research Library Publishing Services: New Options for University Publishing*, provides the best data on library based publishing so far. **Hahn's** survey found that of 80 surveyed and responding research libraries, 44% were offering some type of publishing service and another 21% were expecting to do so. However, **Hahn** found that only a small portion of library publishing services were offered with university presses (<http://www.arl.org/bm~doc/research-library-publishing-services.pdf>). No doubt this has to do with the small number of university presses, but there are many institutions where the library and the press have chosen not to work together for various reasons. But when it might make sense to work together, then what?

In the essays that follow, **Raym Crow** (SPARC) outlines a new SPARC guide, *Campus-based Publishing Partnerships: A Guide to Critical Issues*, that provides readers with some practical questions to ask when exploring new library-publisher partnerships. **Crow** points out that both partners need to understand and share the risks and rewards of collaboration, and that the distinct business cultures, missions, and market relationships will inflect how these factors are perceived and lived. The full SPARC guide includes more case studies of some of the projects discussed in this issue.

Catherine Mitchell (California Digital Library) and **Laura Cerruti** (University of California Press) discuss the history of collaboration between their two organizations, moving from experimental projects to a more formalized strategy based on deep research. As they explain, a clearly articulated set of needs doesn't make it simple to define a new publishing services partnership. But they also report on their initial pilot efforts and the strategy underlying their approach.

Monica McCormick (New York University Library), alone among our contributors, can refer to both the press and library in the first person. As Digital Scholarly Program Officer she reports to both the press director and the dean of libraries and functions as a collaboration hub in a very decentralized environment. With a background in both publishing and libraries, **McCormick** is in a position to bridge cultural gaps while remaining sympathetic to the core values of her colleagues.

Terry Ehling (Cornell University Library) and **Erich Staib** (Duke University Press) detail a partnership formed across organizational and institutional boundaries to support **Project Euclid**, an already established journal aggregation. Their discussion points to some of the distinct benefits that a business partnership can bring to a market-oriented library-based publishing program, and highlights the resource challenges facing new publishing services.

Sylvia Miller (University of North Carolina) writes about a multi-party collaboration, **Publishing the Long Civil Rights Project**. Funded by the **Andrew W. Mellon Foundation**, this fascinating program brings together a university press, university library, and two different research centers, one based in law and the other in history. The effort is potentially quite challenging logistically, but the common focus on an emerging area of research promises to create unique types of scholarship.

Patrick Alexander (Penn State University Press), my co-editor and colleague, writes about the unique assets — both tangible and intangible — that university presses can bring to a partnership with a library, and which the press should emphasize to its host university. Working together, he suggests, can enable both organizations to leverage not only their expertise, but their *brands* to help drive users to original scholarly content and to collections.

Patrick's essay developed in part through work we have undertaken together at **Penn State**, where we share responsibilities as co-directors of the **Office of Digital Scholarly Publishing**, a joint effort of the **University Libraries** and **Penn State Press**. As at NYU and other universities, the press reports up to the library, but a reporting line is not a collaboration. Some of the groundwork for our partnership was laid by our predecessors, our dean, and the press director. Indeed, several publications detailed projects with fast approaching deadlines were waiting for us when we joined **Penn State**, about two years ago. Implementing these projects, which included an open-access monograph series, journal back files, a reprint publication series, and a conference proceedings publication service, presented a crucible in which cultural, business, and process distinctions reared their head. The collaborative projects — which required resource commitments from both the press and library — gave us as newcomers a different perspective with which to assess our base organizations, including the strengths, interests, and capacities of our staff and colleagues. It also allowed us to quickly try out theories about the collaboration and the problems it could solve,

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both on campus and more widely.

We have both been thinking critically about how to move the collaboration further down in our organizations via other projects, not necessarily product oriented, that we couldn't ordinarily undertake alone. Cross-marketing each other and our content is one possibility. Involving the press in program assessments of the library's services to campus might be another, especially as the library begins exploring larger-scale digital services to the campus. But we have both tried to think carefully about what assets we have to bring to the table. As a short counterpoint to **Patrick's** essay, I will respond briefly with three library assets, which are discussed in various ways throughout the other essays in this issue.

Collections

Why did **Google** knock on the library's door? To gain access to millions of books. As their proposed settlement with the **Authors Guild** and the **American Association of Publishers** shows, they (and their plaintiffs) stand to make a tidy sum by aggregating and licensing access to that content back to libraries and individuals. This is a great reminder about the value of the collections libraries have amassed. Fortunately, **Google** doesn't have rights to it all, and library special collections can be mined not only for digitization and online presentation, but also as a source for original scholarship and publications in a variety of forms. **The Long Civil Rights Project** presents one such case where this will be crucial.

Connections

The librarian's focus on service brings them into closer contact with researchers at early stages of a project. Their understanding of their client's preferences and scholarly practices can help the press understand their authors and their markets in a new way. There is much more for both of us to do together here to harness these connections and use them better. **Michael Jensen** adds a useful corrective in his recent *Library Trends* essay: "Nor am I sanguine that our existing cultures, if carried forward, could avoid being made moot: nearly all of the changes necessary depend on something our cultures are bad at: *attention to the personal — the customer, the citizen, the individual*. Publishers, like libraries, need to spend the next five years understanding the nature of their relationships with individuals."¹

Cycles

The library mission to collect, organize, make accessible, and preserve information brings library staff into contact with many more dimensions of the information life cycle. Libraries' core business is not in acquiring discrete titles and articles, but in the processes that surround those objects. Linking that mission with the publisher's focus on creation, credentialing, and distribution can allow us to focus on the system at large and to develop new services accordingly. For example, emerging digital scholarship suggests that future works

against the grain people profile

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BORN & LIVED: Columbia, SC.

EARLY LIFE: Grew up in Myrtle Beach, SC. Spent high school selling LPs and cassettes. Attended **University of South Carolina** and hung out with the wrong crowd. Went to grad school at the **University of Virginia**, joined an even worse crowd. Began working at **UVA Library** and ended up on the straight and narrow.

FAMILY: Married to **Ellie Goodman**. Two cats.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: I am really a humanist by training and joined the library community because it allowed me to explore the way that knowledge is created in many different fields. At **UVA Library** I got to experience the earliest waves of digital services (including publishing services) in libraries, and that has colored my whole professional life. Currently I am serving on **ACRL's Scholarly Communications Committee**, and I've been active in **DLF** and **Educause** as well.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE: Guitar, recently ukulele, previously the presidential election.

FAVORITE BOOKS: Magazines and newspapers.

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: Questionnaires.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: I hope that in five years we can stop focusing on generational differences, especially as they relate to library work cultures and services. For one thing, age doesn't define our relationship to technology and change: attitude and aptitude do. Many of today's students will be as conservative and hesitant as many of today's faculty. Instead, I hope that in five years we will have normalized the range of activities that fall under the rubric "scholarly communications" and begin to think of them as ingrained in our everyday services. 🐙

will be less fixed in form and more open to interaction, which bring new questions about how to sustain and preserve the research record.

These are not the only assets and some may be more important in local contexts. These collaborations are still very young and haven't yet revealed either their full potential or demonstrated that they are not going to be effective. If they are going to flourish, each will need to consider some overarching questions about the future of both organizations. These can be the subject of their own essays, but I will outline just a few here:

How Does the Collaboration Fit Within a Larger Content Strategy?

In other words: what else are the library and press doing to provide access to scholarship, cultural heritage materials, and related information, and does the partnership reinforce those activities? University presses still must consider what subjects to acquire and where they want to market their content. The *Ithaka Report* on university publishing suggested the need for a large scale e-monograph aggregator, similar to **Project Muse**. Would such a service find a niche in today's market, or will **Google Book Search** create the market (and

the platform) for e-monographs? For libraries, the publishing program needs to be squarely tied to their collection development and service strategy. What kinds of digital content does the library want to collect and distribute? Can the library serve only some areas and not others? How will the collections endure? Libraries are familiar with the life cycle of information, but haven't yet fully developed the same processes and strategies that we have for print that we will need in order to build, manage, and preserve digital collections (as opposed to simply licensing or renting them).

What Will Our Organizations Become?

For many of our colleagues, this question goes to the very heart of the threat that collaboration can bring: a challenge to existing expertise, knowledge, and identity, based on a rigorous path of credentialing and dues payments. It's now commonplace to state that libraries and presses will be very different in ten years, and that if they are not they will not survive. Our skills are well defined, complementary, and allow us to capitalize on unique strengths, but we cannot assume that these same skills will serve our community well in the future.

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These types of collaborations alone probably won't be enough, but working together at the very least exposes new skills, and can support the hybridization of staff. Assuming we both will need ever more specialization, can these early collaborations at least help us visualize where we are headed?

**Finally Are These Collaborations
Revolutionary and Disruptive, or
Evolutionary and Responsive?**

Library based electronic publishing, and the institutional repository movement, began with clarion call to dramatically change the landscape of scholarly communications. I don't believe that this has really happened, and I am doubtful that even together we have the necessary capital to make it so. As **Terry Ehling** and **Erich Staib** suggest in these pages, bringing an alternative publishing channel online takes significant investments. Though there have been some shifts in stance and postures among libraries and publishers after ten years of advocacy and experimentation, I can't think of a commercial academic publication put out of business by an open-access or alternative publication. Ultimately we won't change that landscape: researchers will. It may be that the disruption won't be wholly systemic, but localized, enabling both organizations to become more agile in light of their fluid market and information environments. This in itself is ambitious.

Such questions can't be answered only at our individual campuses. But working together, the presses and the libraries may find new ways of carrying out their missions and in responding to, even anticipating, the needs of their changing client base. Or they may decide that there is not enough common cause and go their different ways. At the very least, however, these collaborations are challenging our assumptions about our historical relationships to scholarship and the points of contact that make up those relationships among the scholar, the publisher and the library. Let's use the opportunity well. 🌱

Endnotes

1. "Cultural Tenacity within Libraries and Publishers," *Library Trends* 57 (1, Summer 2008).