

Learning to Say Maybe: Building NYU's Press/Library Collaboration

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New York University is in the early stages of a joint program between the **NYU Press** and the **NYU Libraries**. As of this writing, the **NYU Office of Digital Scholarly Publishing** has existed for just over ten months. With no existing collaborations, but cordial relations and strong motivation, we are starting from scratch. As the first employee of this office, I report to both the library and the press, in a role designed to share the skills and perspectives of each organization with the other. Part of my work is to identify projects on which we can collaborate. This article describes those potential collaborations, which grow out of NYU's particular needs and capabilities. Though collaborative efforts will probably work best when they respond to each university's local conditions, I hope to illuminate here some broad issues that may be relevant elsewhere.

Developing the Vision

Over the last few years, the leadership of our libraries and press began a series of conversations about scholarly communications, together with faculty in the humanities and social sciences, and key staff in Information Technology Services. The participants realized that these organizations had overlapping but not identical missions, distinct skills, and very different business models. They shared a set of concerns about providing new services in response to technology-driven changes in scholarly practices and the university's developing global mission, but had no existing means to address them together. The nascent vision at NYU was articulated in "University Publishing in a Digital Age" (Ithaca, 2007): "... a renewed commitment to publishing in its broadest sense can enable universities to more fully realize the potential global impact of their academic programs."

Although the **Press** reports to the Dean of Libraries, there had been no joint projects beyond a few books published from particular library collections. Both partners realized that they could benefit from the other's expertise, but neither could spare existing staff to coordinate and lead new efforts. Nor was there a person to take active responsibility for developing and managing such a new program. The Provost's Office at NYU provided funding for a single position, reporting jointly to the library and to the press — Program Officer for Digital Scholarly Publishing. The position was created to serve these purposes:

- To bring publishing knowledge and experience into the library, responding to faculty publishing needs in partnership with the staff engaged in digital services and projects, and in consultation with collections and reference librarians.

- To bring the library's experience with digital content (licensing, usability, repository services, etc.) to the press, to support the transition from print books to more hybrid products.
- Most broadly, to contribute to the development of a digital publishing program that will enable the sustainable online dissemination of NYU-supported scholarship.

I arrived in the job with experience in publishing and libraries (a dozen years as acquiring editor at a university press, an MSLS, and a relatively brief stint in another library digital publishing venture). My role is to bridge the two organizations, with their different cultures, business models, and modes of operation. The digital publishing program will rely on both partner organizations, along with Information Technology Systems, but there is so far no clearly defined structure for joint activities. The first tasks, therefore, have been to (1) assess our skills, needs, and opportunities; (2) look for projects that will create operational relationships across the collaborating departments; (3) establish a basic set of processes for the services we hope to provide; and (4) gather information from campus departments, centers, and institutes to develop a sharper vision of the program needs.

The Partners

NYU Press is a mid-sized university press, over ninety years old, which publishes about one hundred books per year. The list covers relatively few fields: American history, sociology, law, politics, criminology, cultural studies and media studies, religion, psychology, and anthropology. As most effective publishers do, we focus on our areas of strength, so are simply unable to consider for formal book publication the extraordinarily diverse scholarship produced by the university's faculty that falls outside of these fields.



Notably, **NYU Press** is near the top of the **Association of American University Presses** in the category of titles published per FTE. That is, our staff is extraordinarily efficient and fully engaged in keeping the organization running. This leaves little room to experiment with the workflow, product mix, or title output. We publish no journals, so there is little in-house experience in the transition from print to digital products. Nevertheless, the press is forward-looking and eager to develop our digital capabilities. We have started with the basics: our books are available in **Google Book Search** and **Amazon's** search-

inside program, we license our titles through eBook vendors (**ebrary**, **NetLibrary**, **ACLS Humanities E-Book**, **Kindle**, etc.), and have improved our Website and digital asset management. We are beginning to explore the costs and opportunities of primarily digital products.

NYU Libraries serves the largest private university in the United States (50,000 students, 16,000 faculty and staff) with a fast-growing collection of four million volumes, five million microforms, 500,000 government documents, 80,000 sound and video recordings, and a wide range of electronic resources.

NYU has been active in digital library developments, with an emphasis on video and Web preservation. We have been a partner in two **National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program (NDIIPP)** grants, one to preserve born-digital public television and the other on tools for archiving Websites. We are co-developers of the **Archivists' Toolkit**, an open-source data-management system for archives, and are working with the **Institute for the Future of the Book** on tools to support networked scholarly communities. Other projects include digital collections of music, images, and rare books. Our **Digital Studio** provides advice and support to faculty and students for creating, converting, and using digital media in research and teaching. **NYU** opened the **Faculty Digital Archive**, a **DSpace** repository, in 2007. We have done relatively little work on digital texts, so the digital publishing program will help to develop those skills.

An important third partner in these efforts is the university's **Information Technology Services (ITS)**, particularly the **Faculty Technology Services (FTS)** team, who are integral to the **Digital Library**, **Digital Studio** and repository services. These are complex relationships, with teams staffed from the library and **ITS**, and leaders who report both to the university CITO and to the Dean of Libraries. The overlapping and intersecting teams are challenging to display on an organization chart, but bring together the range of knowledge and skills needed to effectively provide new services. The complexity demonstrates a level of comfort with ambiguous roles across organizational boundaries, a useful model for the digital publishing program.

Challenges of Collaboration

An underlying goal of the digital publishing effort is to bring the press into a closer relationship with the university at large, by finding ways to share our publishing expertise more widely. This may be through new product areas or partnerships for the press, as a general consulting and planning service, or

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both. With the constraints on staff time and the lack of substantial investment capital, we will have to plan carefully to ensure these efforts' sustainability. Similarly, digital publishing services will create new opportunities for the libraries and our technology partners to support the university's mission. NYU has launched a plan for a new campus in Abu Dhabi, which the university describes as "an effort to develop a new paradigm for the university as a dynamic global network." Leaders of this effort specify the need for "a robust network for shared access to electronic resources and for joint classroom and research activity" (<http://nyuad.nyu.edu/about/message.vice.chancellor.html>). The dissemination of NYU-supported research and teaching on the Web will require strong infrastructure, of which the digital publishing program should be a key component.

As we seek potential collaborations, we are beginning with small projects that can not only establish working relationships but also build capabilities, test assumptions, and shape priorities to guide our transition to services. Among my first requirements has been to get acquainted with relevant staff of the collaborating services, to develop an understanding of each group's priorities, technical capabilities, and workflows. This has illuminated issues that will influence the collaboration. Bringing together the cost-recovery approach of the press with the project- and service-oriented culture of the libraries and ITS reveals distinct approaches to selecting projects.

On the one hand, book publishers have a well-oiled process for deciding what to publish. The perpetual consideration of new manuscripts requires the criteria for acceptance to be clearly understood and articulated as a balance among a work's topic, scholarly value, market expectations, appropriateness for list, and its literal size and scope. Once accepted, projects follow a similarly well-marked path to publication, with reasonably predictable costs. These processes go smoothly in part because they are not often changed. As a result, scholarly publishers may appear intransigent or rigid. Their efficiencies — which are essential to their business success — come at the cost of flexibility.

On the other hand, the selection and development of library technology projects can be far more fluid, in part because libraries have no cost recovery imperative. The criteria for acceptance may include the opportunity to develop particular skills, create new tools, or provide new access to important collections, and the availability of a grant. By contrast, a publisher's most powerful drivers for choosing books — projected market, the subject's fit with the publisher's list, author credentials and standing — are generally not criteria for a digital library project. Digital libraries are able to experiment with new technology; their role is to innovate, often enabled by injections of new funding or grants. As a result, digital library production processes can vary widely, with unpredictable costs and investment of

staff time. Their flexibility may come at the cost of efficiency.

One of the first projects we considered brought these differences to the surface. To the library staff, it was a well-funded project that would allow us to develop skills and tools for managing online texts. For the press staff, it addressed a topic that had little fit with the list and a rather small potential audience. As we discussed the diverging responses, I ventured that we were witnessing what seems to me, with a foot in both camps, a significant library/press distinction. Libraries are service organizations whose funding comes in part from their success in anticipating needs — they tend to say yes. Publishers, working to break even in a highly competitive business, evaluating many potential projects, and with quantifiable limits on their productivity, tend to say no. Both parties are responding logically to their institutional and business realities. **Steve Maikowski**, the press director, considered this and said, "I guess we'll both have to learn to say maybe."

Selecting First Projects

In that spirit, we are embarking on our first efforts. The approach is to explore institutional needs, and seek out projects requiring services that are likely to be applicable elsewhere. We also want to start with fairly simple tasks that can build a shared success, identifying modular processes from which we may develop more complex services. I hope to unite the library and IT capacity for innovation with the press's ability to develop repeatable processes with predictable costs, so that we can build from small projects to sustainable services.

For example, both press and library have small book-digitization projects underway. The press is scanning a few hundred backlist books that lack digital files, for use with our online discovery partners (**Google**, **Amazon**) and eBook vendors. We are willing to make some of these available via open access, to evaluate the impact on sales and access. The library has a grant-funded effort to digitize selected books from two of our libraries (fine arts and math). These efforts are small-scale (fewer than 1000 volumes total) but have spurred us to refine our criteria for the preservation repository, learn more about text formats, and investigate the alternatives for an eBook delivery platform which could support a whole range of content in the future. We will also use the press project as a starting point for ingesting copies of every digital book file in the preservation repository, a long-deferred goal. These are basic efforts, but as we develop them thoughtfully we stand to learn a great deal.

In another case, the research institute of the Abu Dhabi campus has approached us to help them develop a hybrid print and digital imprint for the scholarship that they sponsor. This may include conference proceedings, lectures, translations, and potentially books and journals. We are working (with staff from the press) to help them elaborate their vision of the publication program. Will it include peer-reviewed scholarship as well as more ephemeral work? What will be the relationship between print and digital products? What role

might the press play? At the same time, we are building (with staff in the library and ITS) the infrastructure they will need for digital publications. This is being done in combination with other institutes and centers that want to publish e-journals and disseminate conference proceedings. We are evaluating tools for these purposes that may be deployed at our New York campus as well as for content expected from Abu Dhabi. Our strategy focuses on opportunities that address the university's emerging priorities, which may bring new funding, while bearing in mind the existing needs of the university for which solutions are still needed. So, for example, the long-expressed wish to efficiently disseminate conference proceedings may be met with services developed for the new global network university.

Conclusion

The process at NYU may not mirror that at other institutions, but the first months of our press/library collaboration support analyses of the challenges described in *SPARC's University-based Publishing Partnerships: A Guide to Critical Issues*. We had an existing and complex working relationship between the digital library and IT. With the creation of the **Office of Digital Scholarly Publishing**, the press has been brought into that relationship. We have agreed to align, as appropriate, the partners' distinct skills with our shared mission to support the university with new networked research and publishing services.

At the outset, we have found that governance and administration (in the basic sense of selecting and staffing projects) can be challenging, even with a shared vision of the ultimate service. At this early stage, we are working within existing management structures, with key leaders from the library, press, and IT division setting priorities and assigning personnel, based on information that I gather with collaborating staffs, and from our engagement with faculty and university administrators. As we complete and assess our early projects, we will learn what works and what does not, what tools and processes our existing staff can support, and develop a shared understanding of each partner organization's capabilities. The process will help us to identify our strengths, and, as we continually assess the need for new services, offer us the opportunity to create new institutional alliances, and develop a digital scholarly publishing program aligned with NYU's particular strengths and global vision. 🌱