Don's Conference Notes

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Striking A Balance: The 39th SSP Annual Meeting

Society for Scholarly Publishing

*Column Editor's Note: Because of space limitations, this is an abridged version of my report on this conference. You can read the full article which includes descriptions of additional sessions at **http://www.against-the-grain.com/2017/11/v29-5-dons-conference-notes-SSP**. — DTH*

A record number of attendees — 970 on-site and 40 virtual — gathered at the Sheraton Waterfront Hotel in the historic city of Boston on May 31-June 2, 2017 for the 39th annual meeting of the **Society for Scholarly Publishing (SSP)**.

The theme of the meeting was "Striking a Balance: Embracing Change While Preserving Tradition in Scholarly Communications." Attendees were treated to a plethora of pre-conference seminars, plenary addresses, panel discussions, concurrent sessions, and an excellent exhibit hall featuring the products and services of nearly 60 exhibitors. One of the highlights of the meeting was the unveiling of **SSP's** new modernized logo by **SSP** President **Rick Anderson**, Associate Dean for Collections and Scholarly Communication, **J. Willard Marriott Library**, **University of Utah**.

Rick Anderson *(Photo courtesy of Society for Scholarly Publishing)*

Opening Keynote

The opening keynote by **Paula Stephan**, Professor of Economics, **Georgia State University**, reviewed the changing research landscape and its effect on publishing.

She noted that although PhD production in the U.S. continues to grow, many new PhDs do not have a commitment when they finish their work, so they become postdocs. Most postdoc fellows have a strong preference for research faculty positions, but the competition for those positions is very strong, so the supply of postdocs greatly exceeds the demand for tenure-track positons.

Publications are a

Paula Stephan

necessary condition for getting out of what **Stephan** called "postdoc jail." Many postdocs are willing to work long hours for low salaries and without fringe benefits because they genuinely like the work, but it is absolutely crucial for them to publish their results and be a first author. Many new PhDs, especially in the physical sciences, work in industrial firms that do more applied research than R&D and hence it is difficult for them to publish. The decline of large industrial research labs like **Bell Labs** has exacerbated this situation.

U.S. universities now operate like high-end shopping malls and are building facilities with ample resources and reputations to attract good students. They lease the facilities to faculty members in the form of indirect costs on grants. Funding is all important for principal investigators; "publish or perish" has become "funding or perish." Investigators' labs are staffed by postdocs and graduate students who play a key

role in publishing. The importance of funding raises the importance of publications; the associated bibliometrics play a key role in grant reviews. Formerly limited to physical sciences fields, this model is now spreading to the social sciences and humanities and is also being copied internationally.

Risk aversion is also becoming important because if a project is not virtually certain to be successful, it will not be funded; advances based on transformative research are less likely to occur. Novel research is therefore risky and rare, and highly novel research is very rare. The implications for publishing are that researchers place a heavy reliance on short-term bibliometric measures and are tempted by quick measures such as those in Google Scholar.

Thursday Keynote: Science and the Trump Administration: What's Next

Jeffrey Mervis, a reporter for *Science* magazine, opened the second day of the conference with a discussion of funding, policies, and people affecting research in the federal government. He noted that there is no national science policy and no line in the federal budget for science even though the budget has already been sent to Congress. Nobody in the present cabinet has any scientific credentials or interaction with the scientific community.
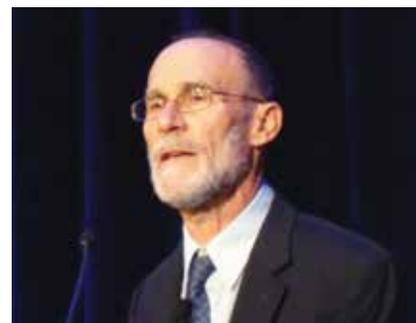
Jeffrey Mervis

There are three components of government policy:

1. *People*. The two leading agencies supporting research, **NIH** and **NSF**, have had minimal disruptions. The Census Bureau is the agency most urgently in need of a new leader because of the upcoming 2020 census.
2. *Budget*. Money is the first thing people think about when they consider how the President can affect science. The budget proposals submitted to Congress call for deep cuts to civilian research and a shift toward the military. The administration seems to be saying that there is insufficient evidence that research is a good investment.
3. *Ideas*. **Trump** has proposed $1 billion to rebuild the infrastructure, and lobbyists have pushed to rebuild the research infrastructure. There is no mention of a science component in the current budget request. We need fresh ways to define the value of science.

Changes in Academic Book Publishing Models

Librarians have projected that eBook usage will plateau in 2017, even though budgets are projected to rise 5%. A standing-room-only audience at this session heard four panelists discuss the challenges of exposing the content of book chapters and changing the way books are packaged.

Katherine Stebbins McCaffrey, Research Associate at the **Harvard Business School**, likened eBooks to butterflies that have forgotten their caterpillar days (researchers have discovered that butterflies retain a memory of their caterpillar environment). Books have been going through a metamorphosis and do not seem to be at home in their present environment. For example:

1. Shelves matter; books were grouped by topic and genre, so once you knew about a book, it was easy to find others.
2. Books have a uniform flexible shareable format that has not changed over time, so they are easy to read many times.

eBooks do not have these advantages because they are not all in the same format.

3. Citations lead to other things to read, but eBooks either do not have citations to other reading, or the citations were added as an afterthought.

Vivian Berghan, Managing Director and Journals Editorial Director at **Berghan Books** (an independent publisher of scholarly books and journals in the humanities and social sciences), said that some things in the current way we are displaying and selling our books are working, but others are not. Print sales are steady; eBook sales are increasing; and user engagement on social media is growing. It is necessary to apply a journals mentality to books and treat chapters like articles. But bounce rates are high, and user retention is not working. Book users are not being retained because systems encourage people to move on with one click to see what else has been published, and on many book pages, there are few places for users to go. Metadata for books needs to be enhanced, and many sites need to be redesigned.

Brigitte Shull, Sr. VP, **Cambridge University Press (CUP)**, said that the rise of publisher platforms has improved the outlook for books because:

• Improved search functionality has helped researchers quickly connect with relevant content,

• Combined book and journal platforms have provided value for libraries, and

• The rise of evidence-based acquisition opens discovery of all content types without a paywall.

CUP has combined its book and journals platforms into one: Cambridge Core, which operates on an agile model of constant improvement.

Richard Kobel, VP, Business Development, **Scope eKnowledge Center** (a provider of knowledge services to specialized information providers), said that metadata and workflow are both important. Metadata has been regarded as core information about a document, but there is really a value chain of bibliographic, descriptive, and semantic metadata that increases the value of the user experience and drives discoverability. Good descriptive metadata is the foundation for enriching content and the core of a successful discovery strategy.

Author abstracts are a challenge because writing them increases an author's workload. Many authors do not know how to generate good metadata, so their abstracts tend to be subjective and unstructured. Scope has developed a service called ConSCIse to provide semi-automated development of abstracts and keywords.

Walking With Giants: New Agendas for University and Society Presses

The role of publishers is changing from simply providing publication services to a "one-stop shop" for authors, who are increasingly looking for higher levels of services to drive the visibility of their publications. Publishers must consider their sustainability and mission, evolving author and infrastructure needs, new metrics, and a new culture of openness.

Elaine Lasda, Associate Librarian at the State **University of New York (SUNY) Albany**, described how metrics are being used in the library's collection process. **SUNY Albany's** budgets have remained flat, so subject librarians decided what metrics they would use. The main factors are cost/use and, to a lesser extent, the impact factor. Usage metrics received from publishers must be converted to the proper format for analysis, which increases library staff workloads. Altmetrics can help solve some of these problems because disciplinary boundaries become less important.

Amy Brand, Director of the **MIT Press**, said that university-based publishing has become a suite of services for authors, and the publisher's role is still to maximize the readership of an author's work. "Host it and they will come" is not a viable solution for most academic authors. University presses cannot keep doing what they have always done. Their values are different than commercial publishers; libraries and presses must very much work together.

MIT Press has recently taken several innovative steps:

• An Espresso Book Machine has been installed in its bookstore.

• The backlist is being digitized by the Internet Archive.

• Partnerships with the **New York Public Library**, **JSTOR**, and **Yewno** have been established.

• Altmetric data are provided to authors, which they appreciate very much because they can use the data to publicize the impact of their research.

Charles Watkinson, Director of the **University of Michigan (UM) Press**, noted that the changing behavior of students is impacting the revenues of the press. Presses must think about their sustainability and potential new revenue sources. Altmetrics can tell the story of the press to its parent institution and can also support small niche journals that otherwise would not be published. **UM Press** is working with **Emory University** to develop a model publishing contract[1] that is intended for use by presses. It is oriented as a partnership, with the author being the winner.

Patrick Hansard, Director, Sales and Marketing, **American Psychiatric Publishing**, said that societies have a broad market responsibility as well as a need to provide for their members. Author services are improved using social media and other communications. Altmetrics speak louder than any marketing comments and are useful in validating editorial choices.

The Future of Content and Its Containers

According to **Tom Beyer**, Director of Platform Services, **Sheridan PubFactory**, containers in the print world include journals, journal issues, and books. Their purpose is packaging, context, and value. Online containers allow multiple versions of content to be produced. The singly authored monograph has persisted, which is one reason why eBooks have not grown online. In the mainstream Internet world, news consumption has evolved, and the value of the containers includes context and additional content. Audio interfaces are appearing; the container in this world is still uncertain.

Ove Kahler, Director, Program Management and Global Distribution, **Brill Publishing**, said that containers are useful as long as they do not become silos. They were created in the print age for print containers, but they are still sustained in today's digital age. Containers facilitate transactions by making content saleable and distributable; the digital age allows larger chunks of content and more of them. Journals and books continue to be vital containers; the big question is how to organize their content.

Will Schweitzer, Director, Product and Custom Publishing, **AAAS/Science**, said that what matters is how people use a container rather than what it actually is — a unit of expression, evaluation, and how it is sold. Since 1999, the use of supplementary material for important content or context that does not fit within standard article constraints has evolved. People are now starting their searches with Google Image; we must pay attention to the services provided by the containers rather than the containers themselves.

Tara Cataldo, Librarian and Collections Coordinator, **University of Florida**, has been studying information choices of students from the 4th grade level through graduate school and their ability to identify containers and determine the credibility of digital resources. Containers chosen by the students included books, conference proceedings, journals, etc. It is important to know the container because it helps determine if the information source is credible.

Friday Plenary: Product Reviews

Moderated by **David Myers**, Principal, **DMedia Associates**, this popular plenary session featured five-minute previews of new and innovative products from the following vendors:[2]

• Atypon
• BenchSci
• Code Ocean
• Crossref Event Data
• Hypothes.is
• LibLynx
• New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM) Knowledge+

- Publisher Solutions International (PSI)
- Remarq
- Scope eKnowledge ConSCIse
- Digital Science Dimensions for Publishers
- UC Press Editoria
- Fulcrum
- Zapnito

You Are Here: An Industry Map to Journal Publishing

Barry Davis, Sales Representative at **Sheridan Press**, described a common problem: it is getting more and more difficult to keep up with new developments in the information industry. Twenty years ago, today's information professionals were children; some journal imprints from that period no longer exist; and predictions of the end of print were common. Today, only about 20% of the industry companies provide background to new employees on the publishing industry.

How do we stay up to date? Many people attend conferences like **SSP** and visit the exhibit halls. But there has been a 45% increase in the number of exhibitors since 2009, and 71% of today's exhibitors were not exhibiting then. **Davis** said that it has become truly more difficult to understand the full scope of the publishing industry, as this slide humorously shows.
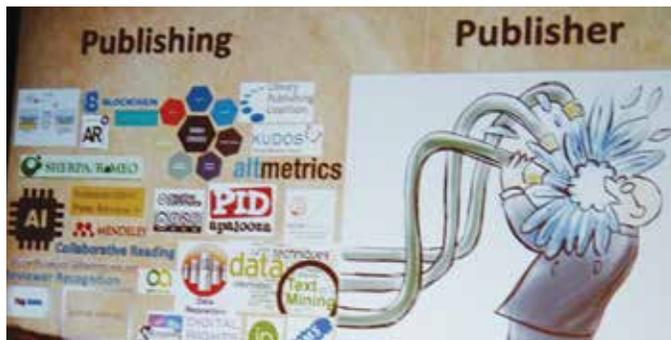
In response to these problems, **Davis** developed a prototype "road map" to publishing to look at the full context of the industry.[3] The biggest challenge in developing an industry map such as this is keeping it up to date and deciding who can make changes to it. It is not **Sheridan's** desire to do this, so **Davis** plans to give the map to the **SSP** Education Committee; meanwhile, anyone interested in this project can contact <industrymap@sheridan.com>.

Not all "Open" Content is Fully Discoverable: What Can Publishers and Aggregators Do?

Each type of content has its own discovery issues, and barriers often exist. This session featured discussions of three types of open scholarly content.

Journals — **Lettie Conrad**, an independent consultant, noted that there are opportunities for collaborative solutions in both general web search engines and library discovery services. But stumbling blocks are difficult to avoid; it can take up to 20 clicks (!) to get to an accessible version of an article. Hardly any platform has all the useful content, so researchers will do whatever will get the job done, even to the downloading of pirated articles. A series of well-known articles by *Science* writer John Bohannon is illustrative.[4] OA is not a panacea and OA articles can be hard to find because article-level data is not handled well even by Google.

Publishers should be concerned that researchers have access to "freely available" content. While Gold OA indexing has improved, 10-50% of the articles are still inaccessible. OA must be in the library supply chain. More targeted work around the user experience and SEO is necessary.

Monographs — **Charles Watkinson** said that OA data for monographs is even more fragmented than that for journals. There is still an important role available for companies that have made money on

sales of books, which is a challenge for OA. He described a report that the **University of Michigan** made to the **Mellon Foundation**[5] in which readers were asked to say how they found and used an OA eBook. Almost all of the traffic came from Google; the library catalog makes only a small contribution to discovery. Social media like Twitter, LinkedIn, and blogs are also important. The *Directory of OA Books* is becoming important.[6]

Open Educational Resources (OERs) — According to **Gerry Hanley**, Executive Director, **MERLOT**, OERs are extremely fragmented. Students do not know their context or content, and faculty members retain control of what they want to teach. Metadata becomes a challenge; content is often organized like the campus, and people do not know how to differentiate among different types of content. Discovery of OERs is still a cottage industry; many useful tools have been reviewed and listed by **MERLOT**.[7]

Open Access Mega-Journals and Innovation in Scholarly Communication

OA mega-journals are fully open and have a large scale wide scope. Their approach to quality control is to consider only the technical soundness of the research they publish, not its novelty or importance. The major examples of such journals are *PLOS ONE* and **Nature's** *Scientific Reports*, which are the largest journals in the world. In some respects, these are like conventional journals: doing peer review and publishing papers in a familiar format. But they have been criticized as being repositories for sub-standard content and focusing on "bulk publishing" without regard for the novelty of the results they contain.

Stephen Pinfeld and **Simon Wakeling**, from the **University of Sheffield**, are conducting a study of the OA mega-journal phenomenon[8] to determine its significance on the academic research community. They interviewed 22 publishers and 9 editors and found these motivations for launching a mega-journal:

- Provide a "home for everything,"
- Effect change,
- Support open science,
- Improve system efficiency,
- Generate revenue,
- Retain rejections, and
- Address market factors.

Peer review policy is the single defining characteristic of these motives; business benefits are linked to revenue generation.

Joerg Heber, Editor-in-Chief, **PLOS**, described *PLOS ONE* as a leading example of a mega-journal. It takes an advocacy role in the open movement. Articles in *PLOS ONE* must be ethical, rigorous, and supported by data (which must be submitted with the article). Everything that deserves to be published will be published, without size limitations. Negative results and replication studies are important parts of the scientific record. *PLOS ONE* is different because it is not for profit, aims to be inclusive for all research, and serves the long-term interests of the academic communities that it represents. Challenges are that others have followed *PLOS ONE*'s lead (which **Heber** said is good because it promotes OA publishing), fewer submissions, content promotion, and quality control and author service. Mega-journals are differentiators in the publishing environment and can be drivers of change in academic publishing.

Peter Suber, Director of the **Harvard** Office for Scholarly Communication and the **Harvard** Open Access Project, and a pioneer in the OA movement, reviewed some of the advantages of OA mega-journals. They can publish faster, so they increase the speed of information flowing to readers and reduce costs. Their peer review processes are more efficient than traditional ones because they review for soundness only.

Suber concluded his presentation with a series of thoughtful questions surrounding mega-journals.[9]

Closing Dessert Course: A Discussion with the Scholarly Kitchen Chefs

At the closing plenary session, the "Chefs" of **SSP's** blog, *The Scholarly Kitchen (TSK)*, gathered for a discussion that consisted of four brief presentations drawing on previous *TSK* posts with views and probing

questions relating to the future of the changing roles of publishers, libraries, research societies, and life in a post-truth world. **David Crotty**, Editor of *TSK*, began with the changing role of publishers[10] and said that content providers have noticed that there may be value in supporting research workflows and university business processes. Publishers are currently shifting from being simply content providers to becoming a full service industry. An article's metadata may be more valuable than its content; if being a content creator is no longer a viable business, what will publishers become? What services can publishers offer to provide value to the research community and can smaller publishers compete in this new market?

Todd Carpenter, Executive Director of **NISO**, addressed the changing role of libraries and said that library expenditures and salaries are exceeding inflation.[11] Students are at their limits and unable to borrow any more money, so the only area for growth is endowments, which many institutions do not have. If funding for government research is cut in future years and student debt continues to grow, we can expect that libraries' fiscal positions will be severely limited. Some pressing current issues that must be addressed by libraries include:

- Libraries are misaligned with their institutions. What is their current role? Do they have enough influence to ensure their position within the institution?
- Libraries seem to be one of the few communities that are deeply committed to privacy. Where more and more services are becoming customized, where does that leave the library? Have they gotten privacy considerations all wrong?[12]
- What is a library today and what are libraries' core services? How an institution defines its libraries will have major impacts on their future in the next decade.

Robert Harrington, Associate Executive Director, **American Mathematical Society**, examined the roles of scholarly societies[13] as they related to membership, mission and governance, advocacy and outreach, succession planning, and strategy and scale. He said that membership is declining. What does it mean to join? Does being a member sill matter? What is the relationship of the society and publishers and what are key challenges faced by society publishers?

Kent Anderson, CEO of **Redlink**, and **David Smith**, Head, Product Solutions, **The Institution of Engineering and Technology (The IET)**, concluded the session by examining life in a post-factual world., i.e., scientific publishing in a time of political assaults.[14] Several issues are of concern: authors seeking anonymity for safety, immigration of scientists, defunding of meetings, detention of scientists and physicians so they are not able to travel to meetings, and the free flow of information.

Publishing has morphed into a suite of services, and the scholarly record is diversifying, so publishers must be attentive to a "wake-up call": misinformation from hackers, Sci-Hub as a security threat, and an attack on the information world.[15] Some problems are caused by Silicon Valley; everything is being done by algorithms. We may have thought this is benign but it is obviously not. Algorithms are built to create and drive markets, not create knowledge; which is causing science to suffer.

The **2018 SSP** meeting will be in Chicago on May 30-June 1 at the Sheraton Chicago Hotel. 🐢

***Donald T. Hawkins** is an information industry freelance writer based in Pennsylvania. In addition to blogging and writing about conferences for **Against the Grain**, he blogs the **Computers in Libraries** and **Internet Librarian** conferences for **Information Today, Inc. (ITI)** and maintains the **Conference Calendar** on the **ITI** Website (**http://www.infotoday.com/calendar.asp**). He is the Editor of **Personal Archiving: Preserving Our Digital Heritage**, (Information Today, 2013) and Co-Editor of **Public Knowledge: Access and Benefits** (Information Today, 2016). He holds a Ph.D. degree from the **University of California, Berkeley** and has worked in the online information industry for over 45 years.*

Endnotes

1. *http://modelpublishingcontract.org*

2. See the full version of this article for details on each of these vendors' offerings.

3. Illustrations of the map appear in the full version of this article.

4. For example, see *http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2016/04/whos-downloading-pirated-papers-everyone*.

5. "Mapping the Free E-book Supply Chain," available shortly at *http://www.publishing.umich.edu/projects/mapping-the-free-ebook/*.

6. *http://www.doabooks.org/*

7. *https://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm*

8. *http://oamj.org/*

9. See the full version of this article for a list of Suber's questions.

10. "When is a Publisher Not a Publisher? Cobbling Together the Pieces to Build a Workflow Business," *https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2017/02/09/cobbling-together-workflow-businesses/*.

11. "Library Expenditures, Salaries Outstrip Inflation," *https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2016/03/29/library-expenditures-salaries-outstrip-inflation/*.

12. "Libraries May Have Gotten the Privacy Thing All Wrong," *https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2016/06/23/libraries-may-have-gotten-the-privacy-thing-all-wrong/*.

13. "The Role of Scholarly Societies," *https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2014/09/24/the-role-of-scholarly-socieites/*.

14. "Scientific Publishing in a Time of Political Assaults," *https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2017/01/31/scientific-publishing-time-political-assaults/*.

15. "Publishing in a Time of Information Warfare—A Wakeup Call," *https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2017/04/03/publishing-in-a-time-of-information-warfare-a-wakeup-call/*.