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COMMENTARY

2016 AAUP-LPC Cross Pollination Grant Recipient Report

Isaac Gilman

*University Librarian, Pacific University
Press Director, Pacific University Press*

As one of two inaugural recipients of the AAUP-LPC Cross-Pollination Grant, I was fortunate to be able to attend the AAUP 2016 meeting in Philadelphia. It was my first opportunity to explore a new community of which I am now a part—we established the Pacific University Press in 2015 as a unit of the Pacific University Libraries—and to do so while simultaneously experiencing both professional belonging (as a press director) and professional “otherness” (as a library director). In my dual role, I am now a producer and a consumer of university press content, and while I have tried my best to maintain a balanced approach, I certainly still privilege my experience and perspective as a librarian when I think about our publishing operations, including our new press. For that reason, I was grateful to be able to immerse myself in the press perspective; to view my library identity from the outside as I engaged with the university press community.

While attending AAUP did provide me with practical knowledge, tools, and resources that will strengthen my administration of our university press (for example, I attended sessions that discussed working with copyeditors and developing profit and loss sheets for books), my strongest impressions were more conceptual:

NO NEED FOR IMPOSTER SYNDROME IF EVERYONE IS WELCOME

As a “liblisher” or “pubrarian” (h/t John Unsworth), I must admit to occasional Pinocchio feelings: someday will I be a real boy (publisher)? Despite the knowledge and experience

Correspondence: Isaac Gilman, Pacific University Libraries, 2043 College Way, Forest Grove, OR 97116, gilmani@pacificu.edu



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that I have gained over the past several years, first publishing journals and then moving into one-off monograph projects before starting our press, it has been difficult to shake those feelings. Although I was looking forward to the AAUP meeting, I also had the expectation that my feelings would be confirmed—that participating in the meeting would reveal to me (and perhaps to others) just how “real” a publisher I am (or am not). And while I did leave the meeting with the knowledge that I still have much to learn, I also found affirmation—which I received both personally and on behalf of my fellow pubrrarians—in the words of Chris Jackson. Jackson, the editor in chief of Random House’s One World imprint, spoke eloquently on the need for diversity in publishing and about his own journey in the industry. And he stated that, based on his experience, publishing is a job that you can learn while working in it, if only others will give you the opportunity. That simple idea—that one need not be an expert or arrive via a traditionally credentialed path—affirmed my own journey as a publisher as well as the value of participating in this community. I do belong here, but there is much that others can teach me.

EVERYONE IS WELCOME, BUT NAMETAGS ARE ESSENTIAL

When the Library Publishing Coalition (LPC) was first founded, one of the immediate challenges was to define the scope of that name: library publishing. Library-based publishing services vary from institution to institution and so, necessarily, the definition the LPC arrived at is fairly broad:

library publishing [is] the set of activities led by college and university libraries to support the creation, dissemination, and curation of scholarly, creative, and/or educational works.

Generally, library publishing requires a production process, presents original work not previously made available, and applies a level of certification to the content published, whether through peer review or extension of the institutional brand.

Based on core library values, and building on the traditional skills of librarians, it is distinguished from other publishing fields by a preference for Open Access dissemination as well as a willingness to embrace informal and experimental forms of scholarly communication and to challenge the status quo.

This definition, while allowing for necessary inclusivity within the library-based publishing community, likely does not immediately assuage all university press concerns that the library is staking a claim to roles that have traditionally fallen to presses. This is apparently particularly true for smaller university presses. I had the opportunity to go to the small

press breakfast at AAUP, and it was made clear by those in attendance that smaller presses have a different experience of library publishing than do their peers at larger presses/institutions—it is more likely to be seen as a competitive activity, not a complementary one. It was suggested that there is a need for clearer distinctions between the unique value that library publishers can bring versus that provided by the university press on their campus. Maintaining clear communication can not only dispel assumptions, but can also identify areas for collaboration between presses and libraries at smaller institutions (or at all institutions).

SHARED MISSIONS...

Despite potential differences in scope between university presses and library-based publishers, at their core, libraries and presses have a shared mission and role within the scholarly community: the community places trust in both institutions to provide access to reliable, accurate, and useful knowledge. As Mickey McManus shared in his opening plenary at AAUP, at its root, publishing is about trust; publishers validate who said something, what they said, and when they said it. Similarly, libraries provide curated collections of information resources, which hold the implicit promise of utility in teaching, learning, and research. During a workshop from John McAdam on conducting a SWOT analysis for university presses, one opportunity (of many) was identified that builds on that trust and also present possibilities for collaboration between libraries and presses: open educational resources. One barrier to faculty adoption of OER has been concerns about the quality of the materials; if university presses are able to identify cost-effective processes for providing credentialing for OER by facilitating peer review and offering the imprimatur of the press brand, it could help address that concern. And libraries could partner with presses by providing support for faculty creation of OER—removing that burden from press budgets.

...AND SHARED MESSAGING

Presses and libraries not only share a mission within the university—they also share (or should) a similar financial model. The provision of scholarly resources through the library and the creation of scholarly resources through the press are both core activities—and responsibilities—of every university. They are activities that must be engaged in not for a separate end (i.e., a financial end), but because of their inherent value and contribution to the institution and the academy. Yet, while libraries are not generally expected to contribute net revenue to the university (although many are increasingly demonstrating ROI), presses usually are (or, at least, to recover their costs). For a variety of reasons, this is an unhealthy and unrealistic model. As was discussed in the closing plenary on peer review at AAUP, scholarly publishing has never been truly self-sustaining in its over 300 hundred years of

existence—Aileen Fyfe observed that it is an activity that has always been “funded by means other than sales.” It is clear that not enough universities acknowledge this reality—and when they do, they sometimes do so begrudgingly, viewing the press as an operation that must be “subsidized.” This was a point of discussion at the small press breakfast, where it was noted that presses should take a page from the library book (pun fully intended), and should not view their institutional funding as a “subsidy” but as a “budget.” University libraries do not receive “subsidies” from our institutions—we have a budget that is provided with the acknowledgement that we are providing a core service to the university, one that is important enough to fund without any expectation of financial return on investment. It is perhaps a small thing, to replace “receive a subsidy” with “has a budget,” but as any editor knows, words matter. And perhaps that small word choice can contribute to a different perception and expectation for university publishing.

PARTING THOUGHTS

While I arrived at AAUP somewhat unsure of my place, I left affirmed, equipped, and challenged. I learned much more than is reflected here—not only about copyeditors and financial models for books, but also about the press perspective on copyright and fair use, about the challenges that libraries and presses share in improving the discovery of open access monographs, and about advocacy strategies for presses. It was a wonderful experience of confirming what I knew and revealing what I didn’t know about publishing and about operating a university press. As the Pacific University Press grows, and as I grow into my dual role as librarian and publisher, I hope to continue to participate in—and to eventually contribute to—my new community.