Learning to Work Together: The Libraries and the University Press at Penn State

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Everyone agrees that university libraries and university presses have a shared stake in the future of scholarly communication. Yet often libraries and presses do not see eye to eye on issues. Also, each has its own professional discourse, which sometimes makes dialogue a challenge. In this article, two librarians and a university press editor discuss how they gradually built a partnership and where that relationship may be headed.

The libraries and the press at Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) have built a working relationship that has resulted in a number of joint projects in recent years. To date these projects have been modest in scope, but they have served the altogether important purpose of testing the waters of collaboration, establishing what we now take to be a solid basis for an ongoing library/press partnership – a partnership that we hope will grow into something more ambitious and far-reaching in years to come.

In this article we offer a brief overview of our partnership at Penn State, how it has evolved, where it may be headed, and the challenges we face as we look to the future. We do not do so because we see our experience as the model that all libraries and presses should follow. Rather, we believe that there will be numerous models of successful library/press partnership and that, ultimately, we need them all if we are to rebuild the scholarly publishing system, which we all agree is broken.

The question of how libraries and presses might collaborate is not 'merely academic.' Behind our efforts at Penn State has been a sense of urgency prompted by a few basic realizations. First and foremost,

we agree that university libraries and university presses have a shared stake in the future of scholarly communication. Without this belief, we would have little basis for partnership. At the same time, we understand that Penn State must be proactive if it wants to shape, and not simply be shaped by, the dramatic changes that are transforming the scholarly community's information landscape. For guidance, we have looked to initiatives such as SPARC[1] and the Tempe Principles;[2] in addition, journal projects such as Project Muse[3] and JSTOR[4] have been models of technology and leadership. CIAO at Columbia University[5] and Romantic Circles at the University of Maryland[6] have given us new ideas and inspiration. We have found projects with library and press involvement to be of particular interest, especially Project Muse and the Electronic Publishing Initiative at Columbia (EPIC).[7]

The seeds of our working relationship at Penn State were actually sown back in the 1970s, when a librarian first began serving as a member of the press's editorial board. This practice, which continues to this day, has proved invaluable in opening up dialogue between our two organizations. For librarians, the give-and-take at meetings affords an excellent opportunity to witness first-hand the editorial operations of a university press, and press staff members begin to see how their colleagues in the libraries view many of the same issues of scholarly communication from a different vantage point. In addition, the director of the press and various senior library administrators have frequently participated in joint discussions at the university level regarding intellectual property. And the director of the press and the dean of the libraries were instrumental in bringing together their counterparts at other 'Big Ten' institutions for in-person meetings, beginning in the early 1990s, under the auspices of the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC).

These modest personal interactions served as valuable points of contact and created a basis for mutual understanding. Even though we may not always see eye to eye – for example, on issues of copyright – the fact that we now have a history of informed cooperation has been essential to overcoming our differences and fostering mutual respect. In the process, we have come to realize that we each have unique skills and abilities to bring to the table.

Two years ago, we decided to take on a project or two that might test and perhaps extend our ability to work together. Our idea was that if we could successfully collaborate on a few relatively limited endeav-

ours, we would then have set the stage for more ambitious and systematic collaboration. Hence we chose projects that required little in the way of extra funding but that nevertheless forced each of us to move a bit beyond our usual comfort zones. In the process we began to better understand each other's strengths (and weaknesses) and simultaneously learned more about our respective institutional cultures.

One of our first partnerships involved a book and a companion web site. The book, published by the press in 2003, is devoted to federally sponsored photographs of Pennsylvania from the 1930s and 1940s.[8] The libraries host a web site that supports and expands the research value of the book.[9] Whereas the book features a selection of 150 of the photographs along with descriptive essays, the web site contains a complete bibliographic catalogue of the more than 6,000 photographs taken in Pennsylvania during the Depression and World War II years. At present, the catalogue is available on the web site as Portable Document Format (PDF) files, but our goal is to move from PDFs to a full-fledged database that links directly to the web site of the Library of Congress, which owns all of the photographs.

The book, of course, is something the press could have produced on its own. The innovative part of the project lies in the creation of the online catalogue, which the libraries are much better prepared to undertake, as they have the technical expertise to create the web site and the storage/archiving capacity to house it. At first, the press had discussed putting the catalogue in the book, but we soon dismissed this idea: it added too many pages. Also, the catalogue contains a wealth of data that may need to be updated and revised over the years. The flexibility that an online database permits thus proved too attractive to resist.

It is worth noting that this one project led to a number of offshoot activities that helped to further deepen our partnership and build collegiality between our two staffs. We held a joint lecture and reception for the project in the libraries, which was well attended by the university community. In conjunction with this lecture we displayed a selection of the photographs and mounted an exhibit of Works Progress Administration–era books from the libraries' holdings. The photographs are now travelling to other sites throughout the state, including the State Museum in Harrisburg, the Lancaster County Historical Society, and the Altoona Public Library.

Building on this experience, we have several more initiatives under way that promise to expand the library/press partnership in new directions. For instance, two of Penn State's engineering librarians recently co-authored a book (together with a Penn State professor of nuclear engineering) on the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island.[10] The book, published this spring by the press, draws extensively on the libraries' Three Mile Island Recovery and Decontamination Collection and web site.[11] The book and the web site should bring attention to each other, especially during this year, which is the twenty-fifth anniversary of the accident. We also plan to make the book available in electronic form as part of the libraries' growing e-book collection.

The Three Mile Island project has further emboldened the libraries and the press to explore a more ambitious e-publishing partnership. The press is looking more and more to use print-on-demand technology for its backlist books, and we hope to make a large proportion of these titles available electronically via the libraries' web site. Using technology developed by the libraries, some titles will be accessible only to members of the Penn State community; others will be available to all users. A link to the press's web site[12] will make it possible for people to buy print copies of books directly from the press, and these titles will be printed 'on demand.' Over time, we will gather data on sales and online usage in order to assess the effectiveness of this program.

Each of these projects has brought the press and the libraries closer, helping us understand our strengths and the areas in which we need to develop greater expertise. The press has considerable experience working with authors, managing the peer review process, creating attractive and readable books, and marketing them to diverse audiences. The libraries bring expertise in digitization, knowledge of access mechanisms (including indexing and metadata), and knowledge of user behaviour and demands. Together, we are developing a core of shared knowledge about the economics of a successful business model, the intellectual property issues, and how to manage these complicated projects successfully.

Having made such significant strides, we have just begun to explore an electronic publishing partnership on a larger scale, one that attempts to address the crucial problems facing scholarly communication in the humanities. Until very recently, the press published a

distinguished monograph series entitled Penn State Studies in Romance Literatures. Books published in this series were well reviewed in scholarly periodicals and often played a favourable role in tenure and promotion decisions for their authors. After thirteen years and more than twenty books, however, the press was forced to discontinue the series: rising costs and declining sales made it no longer viable financially. In its place we are proposing an online Romance Literature series, to be co-sponsored by the press, the libraries, and the departments of French and Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. Again, the libraries will bring considerable expertise in e-technology, collection development, and electronic archiving to the project; the press will contribute its own expertise in peer review, content development, design and production, and marketing. And, of course, the academic departments will provide the scholarly 'stamp of approval' in the form of an editorial board and the jurying process.

Some of the longer-term considerations we must evaluate are as follows:

• Press use of electronic repositories hosted on the libraries' servers and network
• Digitization and joint access via the libraries' e-repositories for back titles of the press and digitized texts from the libraries, using a shared print-on-demand and e-commerce capability
• Online e-journals, a three-way partnership between faculty, the press, and the libraries

At Penn State, we've learned that building a collaborative relationship takes time. It takes the patience to 'start small' and to move forward only when the partnership has matured sufficiently to provide solid footing for the next step. Of great importance is the encouragement and support of senior administrators. At Penn State we would not have been able to move forward without the backing of the Dean of University Libraries, the Director of the Penn State Press, the Vice President for Research, and the Provost. If, indeed, we in the scholarly community mean to ensure cost-effective and integrated access to the research we produce, we will need to initiate more and more of these partnerships throughout Association of Research Libraries (ARL) member institutions.

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1 Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC), http://www.arl.org/sparc/

2 Association of Research Libraries (ARL), *Principles for Emerging Systems of Scholarly Publishing* (10 May 2000), available at http://www.arl.org/scomm/tempe.html

3 Project Muse, http://muse.jhu.edu/

4 Journal Storage: The Scholarly Journal Archive (JSTOR), http://www.jstor.org/

5 Columbia International Affairs Online (CIAO), http://www.ciaonet.org/

6 Romantic Circles, http://www.rc.umd.edu/

7 Electronic Publishing Initiative at Columbia (EPIC), http://www.epic.columbia.edu/

8 Allen Cohen and Ronald Filippelli, *Times of Sorrow and Hope: Documenting Everyday Life in Pennsylvania During the Great Depression and World War II: A Photographic Record* (University Park: Penn State University Press 2003)

9 Times of Sorrow and Hope, http://alias.libraries.psu.edu/ebooks/timesofsorrowandhope/

10 Bonnie Anne Osif, Anthony J. Baratta, and Thomas W. Conkling, *TMI 25 Years Later*: *The Three Mile Island Nuclear Power Plant Accident and Its Impact* (University Park: Penn State University Press 2004)

11 The Three Mile Island (TMI-2) Recovery and Decontamination Collection, http://www.libraries.psu.edu/tmi/

12 Penn State University Press, http://www.psupress.org/index.html