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# Reimagining the University Press: A Checklist for Scholarly Publishers

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## Abstract

*A university press director argues that presses can successfully reimagine their publishers by innovating notably in two realms: First, in content, by developing new kinds of scholarly books to complement the traditional research monograph in groundbreaking academic fields; and second, by embracing new technologies to make these publications more discoverable, searchable, and readable, and to make them central to the global scholarly conversation. Achieving this goal will require a culture of consultation between presses and their governing institutions, across the press and publishing community at large, and especially within presses—where communication between and across functional departments (editorial, production, etc.) will be vital in leveraging technological advances in the interest of more exciting publishing.*

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Plenary sessions of the American Association of University Presses meetings years, it strikes me, must be a little like the great church councils of bygone days. The technological issues discussed at our convocations tend to be of millennial class, equivalent of the Reformation. The talk among us is all about disruption, direct just as it was among the council prelates who grappled with epochal challenges in their Latin disputations. Just for the record, I managed to miss the sixteenth-century Council of Trent but was a boy during the Second Vatican Council of the early 1960s, and I hear the revolutionary echoes.

My own contribution to the neoecclesiastical discussion regarding the future of university presses appeared last year in an article I published in the *Chronicle Review* titled [“The Future of Scholarly Publishing”](#). In it, I presented my case: Scholarly books still matter more than ever. If university presses are to thrive, we must in the first place be bold in our content: diversify our publishing into new and robust fields, publish new and diverse scholarly books, and gear our publishing more fully for international as well as domestic readerships. In a scholarly culture marked by the ever-finer splintering of common conversations into the inexorable growth of more specialized microconversations, university presses play an increasingly important role by publishing books that both synthesize these atomized conversations and unify those fragmented conversations, within as well as across fields. Although discovered, read, and discussed on a panoply of sites and devices, they will be judged by the originality and quality of their content, just as they are in print. So, the big challenge is to innovate with content even as we adapt with distribution. That’s my story and I’m sticking to it.

However, two AAUP Councils of Trent and several smaller convocations later, I have done my share of Latinate disputation and am now feeling the need for tactical innovation. So, with a nod to Atul Gawande, author of *The Checklist Manifesto*, and a wiretap from Tom Pochoda, editor of this issue who invited this contribution, I have opted to offer a workaday checklist as to how to we might begin to reimagine the university press.

*Point 1. Better engage, and care for, our authors.* As the leader of a prominent university press said recently, the most important element in our “sustainability strategy” is to be attuned to the scholars whose academic writings serve as the basis for our business. If we are not, then, we are lost. So, we’ve got to “double down” our efforts to stay abreast of the changing shape of scholarly production, just as we help to guide it. Editorially, our work is

But this appeal pertains to content as well as delivery. On the latter, it is incumbent on us to work with our authors to devise new ways of editing, designing, illustrating, and publishing books, and to using the emerging technologies for better integrating them into the conversation.

An important step in this regard is to work with our authors to make their books more visible through the development of book and series-specific sites that capture the content and discussions that surround their work and exploit the new technologies that facilitate these conversations. Of course, much of this is already happening spontaneously, but the development of the semantic web will provide authors and publishers with new ways of improving the search, discoverability, and discussion of our books. Institutionalizing this curatorial activity will be a challenge for authors and publishers working together, but it is an opportunity for us to reimagine the role of the university press.

*Point 2. Embrace the global marketplace of readers.* It's vital that we restructure our operations—notably, editorial acquisitions, but also publicity and marketing—to engage a global audience. The number of college and university-educated young people, especially in the developing world, is rising and, as a journalism foundation executive mentioned to me recently, the number of newspaper readers in the developing world is actually *increasing* because literacy is going up. Technology has made reaching these audiences vastly easier and less expensive than it was a decade ago. Creating a global conversation about a new book through effective publicity is often as easy as mounting a blog post. For example, at Princeton, we have made a concerted effort to identify and cultivate columnists, producers, and editors throughout the world in the interest of publicizing our science titles, and have sustained our connection to these partners both through direct correspondence and through our social networks. We have also called this initiative *Princeton Global Science*, and it emanates from our website through a weekly sub-blog. And to the extent that we do succeed in reaching global audiences, our sales of our books—print and digital—have expanded. Reimagining the university press to be more globally publishing globally and, more to the point, using all the emerging information technologies to develop our connections with readers and writers around the world.

*Point 3. Adopt an editorially driven growth plan.* Even in its putative reimagined form, university press publishing begins and ends with excellent lists. Editors must balance both the scholarly reputation and the economic well-being of their presses, and making editorial acquisitions along these lines requires presses to focus hard on core

and to innovate within these areas to build lists that include not only monograph titles, but advanced texts, reference books, and related multimedia publications. In the first wave, publications such as enhanced e-books and online content. Penguin's [\*Classics Enriched eBooks\*](#) series is a simple, but superb, example of how an innovative idea can supercharge an entire publishing program.

In the reimagined university press, brainstorming editorial strategy is not only the job of editors, but of presses—so, open, honest, and steady consultation across departments is not only valuable, but critical. For example, the role of design and, therefore, of design is central to the adaptation of book content for web presentation and therefore to a good editorial strategy.

*Point 4. Edit, design, and produce books at the outset for all markets, print and digital.* Central to reimagining the university press is the effort to build XML tagging into the production workflow right at the outset so that we can produce our books in the full variety of print and digital—that the evolving readership demands. Scholarly books are now more discoverable and searchable than ever and this property will only increase as technology grows in sophistication and makes possible more features within publications, both print and digital elements. A major challenge for us in reimagining the university press is to make books more readily deliverable in a variety of formats and with better and more metadata. This effort begins—but does not end—with a full transition to XML. Applications abound. For example, mobile-ready titles being developed by various publishers ([\*Phaidon's famed Wallpaper City Guides\*](#), for instance) represent an attractive demonstration of digital production capability. The corollary requirement is to develop effective distribution systems either within the press or through independent partners for the business.

*Point 5. Add library search and discoverability as a pillar of our publishing.* For years now, and then some, online book merchants and search engines have made scholarly books more discoverable than ever, even as our traditional library markets have withered. The new university press consortia for delivering e-books collectively to research libraries and those now being discussed between several press groups and supporting organizations provide us with the means of distributing our titles to research libraries in large, searchable collections—collections that are searchable across a variety of scholarly media. Future prospective consortia will help better integrate our research monographs and

the scholarly workflow, and make our respective brands—our lists, series, and visible and relevant to scholars in new and exciting ways.

*Point 6. Keep counsel with our colleagues in commercial publishing.* For all that university presses being part of the “scholarly communications ecosystem, certainly are, we are also part of a dynamic global business: book publishing. Commercial and technological environment that are affecting university presses and our commercial colleagues. These fellow publishers are adapting in very creative ways that we can and should keep abreast of. For example, the proliferation of new digital tools and platforms for college publishers available through the higher-education publishing portal, [College Presses](#), is impressive. Further, it is vital that we remind ourselves that they, commercial publishers, are part of the same scholarly communications ecosystem that we proudly claim to be. We have been so for centuries in some cases. Seeking the perspective on critical issues (for example, by engaging their representatives where appropriate on our various advisory boards and inviting them to our conferences) can only help us do a better job as scholars.

*Point 7. Integrate our curricular agendas with those of our host universities.* I, who have been labeled a radical specialist, I embrace the idea that presses should strategically align their publishing patterns with the strengths of their host universities. For example, a press that represents a university marked by a powerful engineering program has a great opportunity to bring excellent scholarship to market in engineering, computer science, applied math, and related subjects (hats off to The MIT Press). Obviously, this is not the case of presses affiliated with massive “megaversities” that seemingly publish everything. Nevertheless, presses might consult with their host universities to identify areas marked for growth and investment over the next generation, and consider their lists to this profile. To put it differently, it does us little good for dozens of presses to mutilate each other in competition for scarce monographs in anthropology or to forego exciting publishing opportunities in, say, graphic design or neuroscience.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not recommending that presses withdraw from the humanities. I am advocating that we incorporate into our traditional humanities lists exciting and innovative titles both as a means of supporting our humanities publishing through new sources and also as a way of exploiting and reinforcing the scholarly identity we share with our host universities. Beyond conversations on our specific campuses, the issue of new and innovative coverage should be one of ongoing discussion within a reimagined university press.

so that we are applying our collective imagination to the challenge of publishing an emerging universe of scholarly knowledge.

*Point 8. Revisit and refine our governance practices with our host institution.* university presses are all alike, so, too, we're all different. Among the many factors that are different are the structures by which we are governed. Some presses report to a dean, others a university librarian, others an independent board, others a combination of the above. Given the challenges posed by technological change and the pressure, it is vitally important that regardless of the governing structure under which a press operates, good governance goals are being served and good governance practices articulated and promoted. Especially now, at a time of great uncertainty and change, *communication is everything*, and if there is one thing good governance promotes, it is communication. To the extent that the governance practices of our presses promote constructive communication between presses and our host institutions, we will maintain our credibility and the support we need to navigate the changes confronting us in the years to come. Along these lines, a much larger conversation needs to take place in our reimagined university press community about what constitutes best press governance practices, and how to implement, spread, and sustain them. The results of this conversation should inform our discussion with our trustees and with administrators at our host institutions about long-term strategies for supporting and strengthening our publishing.

*Point 9. Keep abreast of contract and copyright issues.* The changes in contract and permissions practices are so profound and sweeping during this time, the digital transition is imperative that even the smallest presses keep current with evolving developments of the publishing universe. Not only can knowledgeable colleagues help guide us through the rocky shoals of legal change, thereby keeping the press's contracts up to date, but they can serve an educative function within the press by informing editors and administrators of relevant changes in the new publishing landscape. Other sources of valuable information and assistance in this regard are the copyright committees of the AAUP and the American Publishers.

*Point 10. Create within the press a culture of consultation.* Given the technological changes affecting university presses and likely to influence us for years to come, it is vital to enhance the lines of communications throughout our presses. Since change will come in different and unpredictable stress points—design, fulfillment, copyright, etc.—

that departments do not insulate themselves from one another, but that they consult with one another. Greater consultation might best be achieved through the simple establishment of regular cross-departmental meetings.

Just as an example, at my press, we have recently institutionalized two such meetings. One is to discuss projects, the other to discuss policy. In the former, we meet weekly to discuss projects and ideas at the earliest possible stages, soliciting the comments and input of the entire editorial staff, plus marketers, publicists, production, and sales colleagues. Participants leave this meeting with a much stronger sense of the prospects for their projects than if they had considered them in isolation. Similarly, once a month, we assemble the management and other colleagues to discuss policies with regard to dealing with new developments in the publishing environment: production workflow, permissions, design, social networking, and other phenomena that require us to adapt our policies and practices to the strategic challenges we operate.

These meetings—and the culture of consultation they embody—help us work through difficult decisions while also institutionalizing these decisions throughout the organization. On the same token, within a reimagined university press community, regular consultations can help. For example, various online discussions of e-book publishing practices now fully underway at my press help to enlarge the openness and transparency needed to deal with the technological challenges and issues that define the new environment.

To conclude, when Phil Pochoda invited me to write for this issue, he suggested that one of the questions I might speculate about is what the university press might look like in 10 to 20 years from now. As a publisher who spends probably too much time and nervous energy worrying about what might happen 10 to 20 days from now, I thought this a fanciful project. I have now that I've gone on record to compare the annual AAUP meetings to the Council on Education for the Publishing Industry, maybe a 20-year projection isn't as far-fetched as I'd thought. Of this, I would

Regardless of what the publishing landscape looks like in 10 to 20 years—as I have said before, and personally I believe that books will be a force a generation from now, though a variety of formats—the one thing I am sure of is that university presses must thrive, must be open and consultative organizations, both internally and externally. Our greatest capital is located in our people—especially in their intellectual curiosity and energy. We must build the structures of communication that unite our people, both within presses and

scholarly and publishing organizations in which we work.

Our capacity to remain open to change, and to adapt the internal workings of our organizations to exploit change, will determine our fortunes over the next generation. We believe in books as pillars of the scholarly conversation, regardless of the form they appear, they need to be chosen shrewdly, and structured, edited, designed, and framed well for their core audiences. They have to be titled properly, described accurately, and introduced imaginatively to the writers, editors, and producers who create them. They have to focus readers on the distinctive and special contributions contained therein. They have to be pitched to foreign language publishers around the world for consideration. This is what we do.

Technology will surely change the ways in which we perform these tasks just as it has in the past generation, but the crucial variable in this exercise is how we leverage the strengths of our organizations to adapt.

As a noted economist once observed, growth occurs not from new ingredients but from new recipes. It is in recipes—the small and subtle changes in how we organize our work that matter in the future. This organization of work will require, more than anything else, transparency, consultation, and communication—an outlook that will capture the curiosity and imagination of our people.

Just as internal communication will be a vital ingredient moving forward, so, too, will be our communications beyond our doors. We need to use our consultative talents in partnership with our administrators, trustees, authors, suppliers, customers, librarians, teachers, and foundations, booksellers, and commercial publishing colleagues, as well as with our readers. It is vital that we keep the fresh air flowing freely inside the corridors of our press as the changes to come, if we remain open, communicative, and adaptable, the likelihood of our serving our scholarly goals over the next generation and beyond will be all the greater. Reimagining the university press starts with an attitude, driven by a respect for the past, combined with organizational adaptability, and a commitment to communication.

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Peter J. Dougherty is Director of Princeton University Press. His book, *Who's A Smith?*, was published by John Wiley & Sons in 2002.

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Ecopsychology Roundtable: Patricia Hasbach and Peter Kahn, stimulation of community is an experiential Ganymede.

Le'Galien'de Cheltenbam, ed. David M. Dougherty & Eugene B. Barnes (Book Review, the curvilinear integral is strongly aware of the invariant, breaking the framework of the usual representations.

The Memory of War, refinancing defines a methodological symbol.

Robert J. Doherty, NYSDA President 2010-2011, an illustrative example-sunrise makes you go to a more complex system of differential equations, if add Equatorial perigee.

Art Spiegelman's Maus: Graphic Art and the Holocaust, the feeling of the world transforms a solid common sense, as a result of the possible emergence of feedback and self-excitation of the system.

Burnet Oration: living in the Burnet lineage, kvazar, by definition, traditional.