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Libraries and the University Press: Partners in Scholarly Communication

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Libraries and the University Press: Partners in Scholarly Communication

Abstract

The University Press of Kansas is the scholarly publisher representing the six state universities of Kansas. The Press publishes monographs in a variety of academic disciplines by authors from all over the world, while also maintaining firm regional roots by publishing scholarship on the history and natural environment of Kansas, the Great Plains, and the Midwest. This article will discuss the University Press's role in the scholarly communications ecosystem and how its mission of producing and disseminating research complements academic libraries' efforts toward research and learning. The article will also highlight the Press's efforts to become more engaged with its consortium schools and the Kansas academic community in general through outreach efforts and collaborative initiatives with university libraries. These include providing publishing instruction and guidance to faculty, collaborating on a joint grant application for the Humanities Open Book Program, arranging programming opportunities with Press authors, and offering publishing services not only to the six public universities but also to smaller institutions throughout the state.

Keywords

scholarly communication, scholarly publishing, university press

Libraries and the University Press: Partners in Scholarly Communication

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Kansas's University Press

The University Press of Kansas (UPK) is the publisher for the six state universities of Kansas: Emporia State University, Fort Hays State University, Kansas State University (K-State), Pittsburg State University, the University of Kansas (KU), and Wichita State University. Though its offices are located in Lawrence on the West Campus of KU, UPK actually reports to the Kansas Board of Regents, and the six provosts of the six state universities make up its Board of Trustees. All six universities contribute financial subsidies to UPK. In total this institutional support covers 19.9% of UPK's operating budget (University Press of Kansas [UPK], 2018). Profits from the sales of books must cover the remainder of expenses, so although UPK is officially a non-profit press, in reality it operates on a for-profit business model.

Founded in 1946, UPK publishes books in the areas of political science, military history, law and constitutional studies, American studies, Native American studies, and the history of the American West. Another important aspect of the Press's mission is to publish books on regional studies pertaining to Kansas, the Great Plains, and the Midwest. Though UPK publishes authors from all over the world, it still frequently publishes monographs by the faculty of its parent institutions. Beyond the six state universities, UPK has also published books by quite a few authors from smaller colleges and universities in Kansas. Recent examples include authors on the faculty of Johnson County Community College, the University of Saint Mary, and, because of UPK's focus on military history, the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth (Edwards, 2018; Harvey, 2017; Faulkner, 2017). These examples illustrate that UPK not only serves its six parent institutions but also works to benefit smaller public and private institutions as well.

Partners in Scholarly Communication

University presses and academic libraries share a great deal of common ground in their missions. Both are active in scholarly communication, and both work to further research and learning in higher education. Successful scholarly communication relies on a symbiotic relationship between scholars, academic libraries, and publishers, one in which each party contributes its strengths and meets its needs by collaborating with the other two entities. Scholars create works of scholarship in return for career recognition, publishers produce and sell these works in exchange for revenue, and academic libraries purchase the works to serve faculty and students, who in turn use these works for research in order to produce new scholarship. Libraries and university presses are both in the business of helping scholars create and disseminate new works of scholarship, and when their goals overlap it creates opportunities to develop mutually beneficial relationships.

With the exponential growth of large for-profit journal publishing conglomerates, this mutually beneficial symbiosis is under duress. The inflation of journal subscriptions stresses library budgets, which in turn hurts university presses, because those libraries have less money to spend on monographs (Brown, Griffiths, & Rascoff, 2007). Over the

past decade, the average net sales by member presses of the Association of University Presses has declined by 9.8% (Schmelzinger, 2011; Schmelzinger, 2018). In response, UPK is looking for ways to diversify its services and find alternative forms of revenue, including fundraising. Also, more than ever, the university press looks for ways to demonstrate its value to its parent institutions. UPK's funding has decreased slightly in recent years, despite increasing costs (UPK, 2018). On the other hand, it is in a more fortunate position than other presses that have suffered from funding cuts, and some that have been threatened with closings. The University Press of New England recently announced it is closing after 47 years in business (Gallardo, 2018). A few years ago, the University of Missouri Press was threatened with closure, and currently it's Kentucky that's on the chopping block (Jaschik, 2018).

Often what happens in such situations is that the university press ends up getting annexed into the library of its parent institution. As of 2016 there were 30 university presses in the U.S. and Canada that report to libraries (Watkinson, 2016). That's about 30% of the member presses in the Association of University Presses. That number has doubled since 2009, so university administrators are increasingly seeing the placing of the press under the purview of the libraries as an attractive and economical way of consolidating scholarly communication services under one roof (Watkinson, 2016). Though there may be advantages to this arrangement, it is unlikely to happen in Kansas because UPK is a consortium press reporting to six different universities. Nevertheless, in a financial climate potentially hostile to university presses, UPK feels a pressing need to form strong relationships with the libraries at its parent institutions in order to further its mission, to justify its value to the provosts, and to engage in mutually beneficial collaborations.

Strategies for Campus Engagement

One practice UPK has instituted to foster better campus engagement is simply better communication with the provosts. Former UPK director Chuck Myers invited the provosts to visit the UPK offices, and on two occasions they have held their board meetings there, during which time all of the department heads at UPK had the opportunity to give presentations on their work. This gave the provosts a much better understanding of how UPK operates and the level of professionalism that goes into the books it publishes.

Another strategy for campus engagement begun by Myers was campus visits to each of the six state universities to meet with administrators, the deans of libraries, and faculty in the academic disciplines in which UPK publishes. Since UPK is located in Lawrence, it is easiest to interact with the librarians at KU, so Myers began holding regular meetings with the librarians in the Shulenburg Office of Scholarly Communications at KU Libraries to discuss issues of scholarly publishing. Myers has since departed UPK for another position, but one UPK staff member strives to maintain the library connections he established by serving on KU's University Senate Libraries Committee, attending meetings of KU's Open Access Advisory Board, and also by serving on the board of KLA-CULS. UPK's acquisitions editors continue to make annual campus visits to each of the six state universities. During these campus visits the editors give presentations on scholarly publishing and also conduct individual meetings with faculty and grad students to talk about issues of monograph publishing, offer advice on

how to prepare a manuscript or book proposal, or discuss careers in publishing. They may also consider potential projects with scholars in UPK's specialty fields or talk with faculty about their departments' publishing needs.

Another way that UPK partners with universities and their libraries is by arranging author events, whether in the form of public lectures, book signings, or graduate seminars. Because UPK publishes so many books on Kansas, and many of the authors of those books reside in Kansas, UPK has a network of scholars ready and willing to make public appearances at Kansas colleges and universities. In keeping with its mission of advancing knowledge, UPK has also recently begun a partnership with the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute in conjunction with KU's Continuing Education department. Osher is a national organization devoted to continuing education, with an emphasis on participants aged 50 and over (Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, n.d.). So far three UPK authors have agreed to act as instructors for Osher Institute courses in what UPK hopes will become a long and productive partnership.

Humanities Open Book Grant

Another initiative through which UPK has worked to strengthen partnerships and broaden its services is the Humanities Open Book Program, sponsored by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Kevin Smith, Dean of Libraries at KU, and Lori Goetsch, Dean of Libraries at K-State, invited UPK to collaborate on a proposal for a Humanities Open Book Grant. The goal of the program is to take out-of-print books of lasting scholarly value and make them newly available as open access publications that are freely downloadable as pdfs and ebooks, and available for purchase as print-on-demand books (National Endowment for the Humanities, 2016).

An advisory board was formed consisting of staff members from UPK, the KU Libraries, the K-State Libraries, and faculty advisors from the remaining state universities of Kansas. UPK proposed a collection of 31 books on American political thought. The grant committee came up with a plan by which these newly created open access books would be distributed to all six universities for inclusion in their institutional repositories. The proposal also included the creation of a Kansas Open Books website that would serve as a portal for disseminating and promoting these open access titles, as well as supplemental educational materials that would explain the books' continued relevance and provide guidance for how they could be used in courses on political science and political history. This Kansas Open Books website would then serve as the online hub for further open access collaborations between UPK and its consortium schools.

In putting this project together, UPK and its library partners had to combine their strengths, with each offering to contribute what they do best. UPK brought its prestigious reputation in political science and the original peer-reviewed content. In addition, UPK offered skills required for acquiring and editing the new supplemental content, graphic design (for new book covers, a project logo, and website design), marketing and promotion (such as advertising, soliciting press coverage, and sales at scholarly conferences), experience in ebook conversion and print-on-demand publishing, sales and distribution of the printed editions, and creating publisher metadata for online booksellers like Amazon. What the libraries brought to the table was their existing expertise in open-access publishing through the already established infrastructure of their institutional repositories, as well as their experience in grant-writing, skilled web development

personnel to create the online portal, experience in digitization projects, and the library cataloging and metadata necessary to make these open-access titles discoverable.

Unfortunately, this proposal was not successful in winning the Open Books grant. Though this was disappointing, it was still a valuable learning experience for all parties involved, and the grant committee will soon be reconvening to prepare another Open Books grant proposal for the coming year. In the future, UPK will work toward building further collaborations with its parent institutions by seeking out more collaborative grant-funded partnerships with libraries and other campus departments.

Special Collections-Based Publishing Projects

One area of opportunity for such collaborations between libraries and university presses is special collections-based publishing. Many museums have publishing programs through which they print exhibition catalogs to highlight their collections. Special collections librarians also build collections and create exhibits and digital collections. When the content of these collections falls within its core subject areas, UPK can work with libraries to publish catalogs or monographs that highlight and augment their unique collections. Printed publication can be another medium through which a library satisfies its mission of preservation and access by bringing a reproduction of its unique resources to an audience that may not otherwise have the opportunity to learn from them.

The book *Our Town on the Plains*, about J.J. Pennell's historic photographs of Junction City, Kansas, is one example of how a printed book and a website devoted to a digital collection can complement one another (Shortridge, 2000). The book was written by KU faculty and published by UPK. The photographs are housed at the Kenneth Spencer Research Library at KU, who have put the entire collection online. Another special collections project is *Pittsburg State University: A Photographic History of the First 100 Years*, a book comprised of photographs from the PSU Archives (Roberts & Philips, 2009). Textual sources are also a possibility for special collections-based publications. UPK publishes quite a few historical memoirs and collections of letters, many of them related to military history, and is currently in talks with a World War II museum to publish a series of books based on materials in their archives. UPK also publishes diaries of Kansas settlers, farmers, politicians, and soldiers, and would be particularly interested in publishing books on the Indigenous communities of Kansas or other marginalized populations. Libraries with materials of this nature in their special collections that may be worthy of a book-length treatment are encouraged to contact UPK with a proposal.

Publishing Services

UPK has an extensive menu of skill sets that it can offer to potential customers with publishing needs. These include developmental editing of manuscripts, facilitation of the peer review process, manuscript editing (including copyediting and proofreading), design, production (including typesetting, printing, and ebook conversion), marketing (including advertising and sales), publicity (such as author events, media coverage, and book reviews), metadata for online booksellers, and distribution (which encompasses warehousing, order fulfillment, and shipping). UPK has just begun to think about how it can offer these services à la carte to entities that engage in publishing. Libraries, museums, research institutes, government agencies, or nonprofit organizations that

publish the occasional book or report are all potential clients for UPK's publishing expertise. These would be projects that don't necessarily fall into UPK's core subject areas, may not be peer-reviewed, and therefore would not bear the UPK brand. Though UPK is just entering into this area, several university presses, such as the University of California Press, have recently established publishing services divisions to serve the broader publishing needs of their parent campuses (Mitchell & Cerruti, 2008).

UPK has engaged in collaborative publishing in the past, particularly for its Kansas nature books, having previously partnered with KU's Natural History Museum, the Kansas Geological Survey, Kansas Biological Survey, Kansas State Historical Society, and the Kansas Land Trust. It has also provided production, marketing, and distribution for a series of books on the history of KU from the Historic Mount Oread Friends organization. UPK also recently started a partnership with the Kansas Sampler Foundation, a non-profit organization that promotes Kansas tourism. They were having trouble getting their books into chain stores like Barnes & Noble because they could not meet the booksellers' strict requirements for shipping and electronic data interchange. UPK, who has the infrastructure in place to satisfy these retailers' requirements, now distributes the Kansas Sampler Foundation's books for a commission of net sales (UPK, 2018).

The need for publishing services arises from the fact that scholarly publishing now comes in a wide spectrum of forms. As the scholarly communication landscape becomes more diversified, university presses need a more flexible business model, not only to create alternative streams of revenue beyond monograph publishing, but also to build campus engagement by ensuring they meet the scholarly communication needs of their parent institutions. Though there's likely to be some overlap between the scholarly publishing services offered by presses and libraries, the two are not competitors. As partners and collaborators, they can create a robust and healthy climate of scholarly communication for Kansas higher education. To that end, the University Press of Kansas is committed to engagement with all six of its partner campuses and is willing to engage in partnerships with any Kansas college or university that could benefit from its services.