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9-30-2004

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Royster, Paul, "Electronic Publishing and the University Presses" (2004). *Library Conference Presentations and Speeches*. Paper 4.
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Electronic Publishing and the University Presses

Mid-America Conference on History, Springfield, Missouri, September 30, 2004

from:

Publishing in University Presses in a Tighter Market: A Panel Discussion

Participants:

William Parrish, Department of History, Mississippi State University, chair
Steve Wrinn, Director, University Press of Kentucky
Fred Woodward, Director, University Press of Kansas
Beverly Jarrett, Director, University of Missouri Press
Paul Royster, University of Nebraska

Electronic Publishing and the University Presses

Good morning. I'd like to thank Bill Parrish for the invitation to be on this panel with these distinguished directors of presses, and also this audience for attending a session on such a gloomy topic—a *pre-mortem*, if you will, for the university presses or scholarly publishing.

Last year, Cathy Davidson, Vice Provost at Duke University and a distinguished scholar of American literature, addressed a session of the American Council of Learned Societies on this same subject. She said : "At present, university press publishing provides the most careful, impartial, and efficient system of brokering, networking, evaluating, editing, publishing, and distributing serious scholarship." That's the good news. She also remarked, "The bottom line is that scholarly publishing isn't financially feasible as a business model—never was, never was intended to be, and should *not* be. *If scholarship paid, we wouldn't need university presses.*"

I, for one, am not ready to fold up the tents and go home; nor am I anticipating the institution of a tax or toll on tenure-oriented scholarship that will funnel money back to the university presses from the institutions that

employ the scholars that are being credentialled through the publication process. I'm not against it, I just don't expect it to happen anytime soon. It's not news to anyone on this panel that university presses are struggling to survive and to fund their continuing operations. If scholars feel that they experience "publish or perish," then let them also realize that every press director here has that same dilemma, only a hundred-fold.

How that relates to scholarship in history and to developments in electronic publishing is my subject this morning. I want to sketch some of the financial constraints on the university presses, then to survey some important recent activities in the field of electronic publishing, and then to ask if there are possible connections between the two.

Just as a starting point of reference, let me say that last year at Nebraska, electronic publishing accounted for about 2% of total sales. This is generally in line with the publishing industry as a whole, where electronic publishing probably represents less than 5% of the business.

Now fortunately, this is a history convention, and historians are the chosen people of scholarly publishing. Theirs is the subject area with the largest appeal outside the core profession. Let me illustrate: Last year, at the University of Nebraska Press, sales of cloth books

accounted for 33% of revenues. There were 80 new titles, and over 600 active backlist titles. Twelve cloth titles (10 new and 2 old) brought in more than $25,000. Half of those (six) were the work of academic historians; four others were in history-related fields from museum curators or documentarians:

> *Those books were: Christopher Browning's Origins of the Final Solution, Colin Calloway's One Vast Winter Count, William Shea and Terrence Winschel's Vicksburg Is the Key, and three from Gary Moulton—his Atlas of the Lewis & Clark Expedition, his 13-volume complete set, & his 1-volume abridgement. The four related, but non-academic titles were 2 catalogues (of Karl Bodmer's Western prints and of photographs of Red Cloud), Dayton Duncan's (third) book on Lewis & Clark, and Meg Ostrum's biography of a French Resistance figure. [not: Floyd Skloot, Nebraska Symposium on Motivation]*

In this same year, sales of paperbacks accounted for 63% of income. There were about 90 new paperback titles and 2300 active old ones. Eleven of these (1 new, 10 old) netted more than $25,000. Three of these came from academic historians (James Ronda, Gary Moulton, and Carlos Schwantes). Six others were popular history, documentary works, or historical fiction, by John G. Nei-

hardt, Mari Sandoz, Ralph Moody, Ella Deloria, and Che Guevara *[not: Poet Laureate Ted Kooser, Mildred Walker]*

So history, and closely related fields, accounted for 19 of the 23 top-selling titles. This group of 19—call them the history best-sellers—accounted for over 20% of sales. That's the good news: history sells, sometimes. The rest of the news is how little books sell in relation to the cost of doing business—or how scholarly publishing isn't financially feasible as a business model.

The *average* sales of a frontlist book (in cloth) were about $12,000. Subsequent sales, in years 2 through 5 may add another $6,000; for a total of $18,000. That would represent sales of 450 copies of a $60 book at short discount.

Now the direct out-of-pocket costs of producing a 300-page monograph from manuscript through a print run of 500 copies would be roughly $8,000 all together. So sales of $18 thousand, costs of 8 thousand, gross margin of 10 thousand, or 56%—that would be slightly below target, but not bad for simultaneously maintaining our scholarly mission.

But here's the real problem: the most significant costs, especially for specialized books with limited market, is in the publisher's overhead—what it costs to have what I

call "a place at the table"—things like payroll, rent, supplies, catalogues, publicity, advertising, and development costs. This costs at somewhere in the range of $25,000 per new title, or perhaps a bit more. So our average 300-page, 500-copy monograph that earned $10,000 is actally leaving us $15,000 in the hole, a deficit that has to be made up from the contribution of older backlist titles, from subsidiary rights, from institutional funding and outside grant support. At Nebraska last year only eleven new books, out of 170, brought in $25,000 or more. Sometimes we must seem like the TV appliance salesman who announced: "We lose money on every item, but we make it up in volume."

Now, I'm not here to cry poverty or sing the blues over the problems of university presses. Each house has to find its own right size, and the right balance between overhead costs and number and nature of publications; in some cases by cutting costs, or even downsizing, in others by enhancing revenues through determined efforts or, more often, by sheer dumb luck. What I do want to stress is that simply by putting your book on its publication schedule, a publisher is already risking $25,000 to $40,000, which is not an insignificant commitment. Of course, an author may have committed five years or more of his life, plus his or her professional reputation and career, so everyone has eggs in the basket, and it is in everyone's interest to find collaborative ways of getting

the most out of it.

How does electronic publishing fit into the equation?
First, let me try to dispell a myth: some people assume that if the presses switched over to electronic delivery of their products, there would be enough savings both to close the budget gap and allow for reduced pricing, but a quick look shows that is not the case. The only costs that are eliminated are those for paper, printing, and binding—$3,500 in the above example. Editing, design, and typesetting remain, as do all the same overhead costs as before. The major problem is one of revenue, or not enough revenue, and I want to devote the remainder of my time to how electronic publishing might extend the market for scholarship and enhance the potential for income.

My research informs me that the "crisis in scholarly publishing" extends back at least as far as 1971, which pre-dates the birth of electronic publishing. Still, electronic publishing is now out of its infancy, and well into childhood or even adolescence. It seems to promise things that are truly revolutionary, such as:

- integrated text and images, without expensive production costs
- mega-data and meta-data—no limits on size; enhanced structure and information about

- searchability
- data/text portability and paste-ability
- hypertext and hyperlinked documents that alter the reading experience in ways print cannot imitate
- content that interacts with the user
- delivery systems that bypass the traditional limitations of distribution (immediate, worldwide, 24/7)

What remains to be discovered is an overall solution to the income or revenue side of the equation. Some few facts are now emerging.

In electronic publishing there are already established areas that pay:
The applicability, suitability, and profitability of electronic publishing for **journals** is a fact beyond dispute. Truly, the success of electronic journals publishing is now being blamed for the decline of the scholarly monograph, through its relentless devouring of library acquisition budgets. At Nebraska, journals account for over 80% of electronic publishing income. Those presses with the largest journals programs—Chicago, Duke, Toronto, Johns Hopkins—are in the best position to benefit from continued growth in this area. Here I should mention **Project MUSE,** which has for nine years provided online institutional subscription access to over one hundred

scholarly journals in the arts and humanities, social sciences, and mathematics. It now has almost 30 publisher participants. A humanities or social science journal in one of MUSE's basic subscription packages might be worth in the neighborhood of $10,000 a year to the publisher. http://muse.jhu.edu

The suitability of electronic publishing for **reference works** has also been demonstrated—as CD editions, bundled software, or online versions. This is another area that pays, and has been aggressively developed by commercial imprints. Good examples would be the online edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Language-learning is another good example.

For **best-sellers**, and for some **trade** areas, too, there is now a large enough market for ebooks to support publishing these types of products. http://**eBooks.com** offers over 30,000 titles in three digital formats (Microsoft Reader, Adobe Reader, and Mobipocket), including almost 2,000 in "history" (and over 1,000 from Cambridge UP; 115 from Indiana UP; 107 from Oxford; 2 from Purdue, and 55 from California). These are mostly electronic by-products of the physical-book publishing process, generally priced lower than the printed versions. This is not an especially large area at the moment, but one that has clearly emerged, and will be among the fastest growing as technology becomes more familiar and

more content becomes available. As of now, this area pays the minimal extra costs of electronic formatting, but usually not the full costs of origination or development. This is incremental revenue derived from the core business, with some small additional investment. It does not threaten to overtake or replace the core business in the foreseeable future.

Next, although not purely electronic publishing, but related, is **on-demand publishing**: digital printing of a single copy from an electronic archive of "virtual inventory." **Lightning Source,** the largest supplier, has 175,000 orderable titles. For an initial cost of around $200, and a maintenance fee of $50 a year, a book can remain in print and available indefinitely—as a book: it is furnished to the customer as a physical object, not as bytes. Presses are now taking advantage of this method to retain "content" or "products" over a long term without the traditional large investment in physical printed copies. This is a happy development, both for the publisher and the author. It resolves the problem of what to do with worthy, but slower-selling, titles that formerly tied up the publishers working capital and warehouse space and made relations with some backlist authors uncomfortable. In a related development, the **Authors' Guild** and **iUniverse**, an on-demand publisher, have a program especially for out-of-print authors at http://**backinprint.com**. [url not responding, see

http://www.iuniverse.com/book-publishing/out-of-print-publishing.htm]

Then, there are **online resource archives** of various sorts: basically libraries or collections that charge fees to institutions or individuals for online look-up, search, and full-text access. There are non-profits, like **Netlibrary** (now a division of OCLC), which at UNL has 2449 ebook titles, including about 800 from university presses, 741 in history, as well as a reference center. And there are for-profit groups, such as http://**Ebrary.com**, with 20,000 titles for libraries or individuals, who pay to print pages or copy text; or **Questia**, billed as "The World's Largest Online Library," which offers individuals, for $15 a month, access to 50,000 titles and 400,000 articles. Another kind of site is http://**Bartleby.com**, which offers free access to a modest library of reference works and classics and generaties its income from links and onscreen advertising. Income to presses from these sources is presently insignificant—an average title might be worth about $40 a year. Still, as available content and usage both increase, this may become more significant, though it will not become a driving force behind publication within the next dozen years, I think.

Finally, there is a new effort recently launched by http://Google.com that may eventually offer full-text

searching of every book in print (or at least every book whose publisher is willing). This is for searching only, not full-text access, and it is basically an advertising device. The publisher provides a scannable copy of the book, from which Google prepares a searchable text for its engines to "crawl". A search hit on a book page brings up an image of the page with a set of links where the physical book can be purchased—from the publisher, Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble, etc.

Then there are areas that don't pay—yet—but offer important scholarly resources.

There are a vast array of electronically published or provided materials available today. A quick survey reveals the following types of work; and these are examples, not an exhaustive list:

Digitization projects, such as **Making of America**, a digital library of primary sources in American social history from the antebellum period through reconstruction, containing 8,500 books and 50,000 19th-century journal articles. Made possible by grants from Mellon Foundation, with support from the University of Michigan and Cornell University. http://hti.umich.edu/m/moagrp/

Databases, such as Electronic Enlightenment, from the Voltaire Foundation and the University of Oxford. This

offers online access to over 45,000 letters by 3,800 authors. The site is http://e-enlightenment.org , and once again Mellon money is involved. Another site, http://Books-on-line.com, claims 28,000 links to online downloadable (free) books. One of the earliest sites is **Project Gutenberg** [http://gutenberg.org], which lists over 12,000 ebooks, mostly public domain materials.

Multimedia projects, such as the **Perseus Project,** [http://perseus.tufts.edu] out of Tufts University Classics Department, which includes primary texts, images, and reference materials on ancient Greece. This is an online project that also publishes a CD set and manual package with Yale University Press. Another site is The Stoa: A Consortium for Electronic Publication in the Humanities, at http://stoa.org.

Periodicals archives, such as **ArXiv**, an e-print service for journals in physics, mathematics, non-linear science, computer science, and quantitative biology. **ArXiv** - http://arxiv.org/ -- is owned, operated and funded by Cornell University, and supported by Sun Microsystems and the National Science Foundation.

Among the university presses, there are a number of ongoing efforts that deserve special mention:

The Electronic Publishing Initiative at Columbia University (EPIC) involving Columbia University Press, the Libraries, and Academic Information Systems. This includes Columbia International Affairs Online (or CIAO), Columbia Earthscape, NSF Columbia Pubscape, and Gutenberg-e (about which, more later). http://epic.columbia.edu

University of California Press eScholarship Editions: More than 1400 books from the University of California Press are available online free of charge. 400 of them are free to the public, the remainder are limited to UC faculty, students, and staff. UC Press also provides full text on-line versions of its journals to institutional and individual subscribers.
http:// escholarship.cdlib.org/ucpressbooks.html

The New Georgia Encyclopedia: the nation's first state encyclopedia written specifically for the internet is a joint project of the University of Georgia Press, The Georgia Humanities Council, and the University System of Georgia. Launched in February 2004 with approximately 700 articles, and plans for expansion. The encyclopedia is strictly digital and free to all users.
http://georgiaencyclopedia.org

The National Academies Press, which offers all of its titles—more than 2,100—online, fully searchable and readable, for free. Their recent study, funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, of new ways to deliver content electronically, and possible pricing models, is also available online. http://nap.edu

University of Virginia Press Electronic Imprint: publishes original digital scholarship in the humanities and social sciences. Announced projects include digital editions of the papers of Dolly Madison, of George Washington, letters of Emily Dickinson, Christina Rossetti, and Mathew Arnold, and a "fluid-text" edition of Melville's *Typee*. The imprint is supported by funds from the Andrew Mellon Foundation and the President's Office at the University of Virginia. http://ei.virginia.edu

The Chicago Digital Distribution Center and BiblioVault—a digital printing facility and an electronic repository of book files from the University of Chicago Press's Distribution Center warehouse facility. A grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation will fund the digitization of 5,000 titles from participating presses. The electronic repository, known as BiblioVault, will initially be used to serve the digital printing facility, but will eventually allow public search and browsing of the electronic content. http://cddc.uchicago.edu

The History Cooperative: the AHA, the OAH, the University of Illinois Press, and the National Academy Press have made the full text of current issues of the *American Historical Review,* the *Journal of American History, The William and Mary Quarterly,* and 15 other journals available electronically to members of the AHA and OAH and to institutions that subscribe to the print versions of the journals. http://historycooperative.org

One other project I want to note, not so much for its uniqueness or breadth as for its special interest to historians in this venue and because it illustrates the dilemma. It is **The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition Online**. This is a joint project of the **University of Nebraska Press**, the **Center for Great Plains Studies**, and the **UNL Libraries Electronic Texts Center**. Grant support from the NEH offsets most out-of-pocket costs and some expenses, but that is short-term and the parent institution gets a fair share and performs most services. There is no income or revenue other than the grant, and it is not presently, in any strict financial accounting, beneficial to the Press. Ultimately, when finished, there will be a hypertext, inter-linked, multimedia enhanced edition put online for free, accompanied by supplemental accounts, maps, audio, and secondary materials. Someday, perhaps, there will be a CD edition that can be sold for money, or a subscription site, or some income-producing

component. Someday. Maybe.
http://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu

Two pilot projects of special interest to historians

Gutenberg-e http://gutenberg-e.org
A cooperative project of the AHA, and Columbia University Press, and the Mellon Foundation (which contributed over $1 million) specifically for electronic publishing of scholarly works in history. Six new titles selected annually from dissertations in history, with $20,000 awards to be used to develop manuscripts into enhanced ebooks. Eleven titles are now available, eight more are forthcoming. Subscriptions to Gutenberg-e are $195 annually, which gives an institution unlimited campuswide access. Individuals may purchase any of the e-books for $49.50, which gives them access to the full text and supplementary materials in perpetuity.

History E-Book Project http://historyebook.org of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Mellon Foundation ($3 million). Ten university presses—Columbia, California, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Michigan, MIT, NYU, North Carolina, Oxford, and Rutgers—will supply 85 "frontlist" titles, enhanced with searching, links, and add-ons; 14 of these have been released so far. Fifty-seven other publishers will supply 800 "backlist" titles (adding 250 annually). The History E-Book

Project library is available to institutions only, at a cost of $350 to $2,000 annually; there are currently 180 subscribing institutions. Project directors are Eileen Gardiner & Ronald G. Musto, who are pioneers in electronic publishing and the proprietors of Italica Press, http://italicapress.com.

How best to pull these subjects together: the financial crises of university presses and the emerging technologies for electronic publishing and scholarly communication? Clearly, the Mellon Foundation and others have channelled significant resources into developing the means and expertise, on the theory that "teach a man to fish and you feed him for life." How long will this extend, and what will happen when electronic publishing has to pay its own way? The university presses publish more than 10,000 books each year, out of over 150,000 published in the United States. These pilot projects make about 20 of them into ebooks annually, a trickle compared to the flood of conventional publications. Publishers won't survive by selling more products into a shrinking market or by giving away what they invest in developing. Will electronic publishing effectively expand the individual market, the instructional market, or the institutional market? I'd say we are in for exciting times, and we have no choice but to get on board and hold on for the ride.

And finally, some Frequently Asked Questions, practical and theoretical

Q: Can I put my book online on my website?
A: Ask your publisher, but don't be too surprised if they have a problem with it.

Q: Can the publisher help develop my materials into a website, hypertext, or electronic package?
A: Probably not. Developing an electronic package from raw data can easily run from $20,000 to $50,000; far more than a university press can risk or ever hope to recover.

Q: Can I include my data sets/documents archive/whatever on a CD with the book?
A: Yes, absolutely, but be aware that it will add about $10 to $20 to the price.

Q: Can I make a separate deal for my electronic rights or retain them?
A: You might, but you would be shooting yourself in the foot. The publishers are the best representatives for these rights, and if theyt don't have them to offer, they can't do anything with them. Make the best deal you can, by all means; and that may be for somewhere between 10% and 35% of the electronic income, depending on who bears the costs of development. But don't think—currently—that this is a gold mine or that the presses are getting a sweet deal. For now, the best strategy is to maximize distribution—to make the scholarship as widely accessible as possible.

Q: Why haven't university presses done more?
A: 1. The investment is prohibitive: servers, software, and—most of all—expertise. It is tremendously difficult to find a digital expert who is knowledgeable, capable, and willing to work long-term for what a university press can pay. This is why the efforts funded by the Mellon Foundation are so important: they allow for the development of basic knowledge and procedures that can be shared among the interested parties.

2. It has been unclear who should handle it—editorial, production, sub-rights, IT? Electronic publishing cuts across the traditional divisions within a publishing house. Large publishers can create an entire division to exploit this area, but smaller houses don't have that luxury. Here again, the Mellon-funded projects are extremely critical, allowing for the beginnings of cooperative consortiums that are probably the university presses' best hope.

Q: What can academic scholars do?
A: 1. Include your electronic rights with your book contract

2. Develop electronic works, especially *instruc-*

tional materials

3. Be innovative; the market will catch up in time

4. Keep writing. Publishers need manuscripts like the beef industry needs cattle.

Q: What does the future look like?

A: 1. Collectivism: more cooperatives, consortia, and pooled resources; this is the only way that smaller publishers can participate effectively.

2. Greater availability of materials to scholars and students. Far greater number of books in print and online.

3. Growing acceptance of non-traditional publications for tenure and promotion purposes. Key issues will be permanence and availability—of the record of the body of work. "Error 404--URL not found" can't be good, ten years from now when a university is wondering why it granted someone tenure.

4. Growing importance of online presence: visibility to search engines, real-time updates, online commerce, functionality, put as much information as possible online

5. More interaction between presses, faculty, and the campus library.

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[see rather, http://www.iuniverse.com/book-publishing/out-of-print-publishing.htm]

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http://aaupnet.org

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