



The Library Publishing Coalition: organizing libraries to enhance scholarly publishing

Library-based publishing efforts are gaining traction in academic and research libraries across the world, primarily in response to perceived gaps in the scholarly publishing system. Though publishing is a new area of work for libraries, it is often a natural outgrowth of their existing infrastructure and skill sets, leveraging the institutional repository as publishing platform and repositioning librarians' skills as information managers. For decades, these initiatives were primarily ad hoc and local, limiting the potential for library publishing to effect significant change. In 2013, over 60 academic and research libraries collectively founded the Library Publishing Coalition (LPC), a professional association expressly charged with facilitating knowledge sharing, collaboration and advocacy for this growing field. This article offers an overview of library publishing activity, primarily in the US, followed by an account of the creation and mission of the LPC, the first professional association dedicated wholly to the support of library publishers.

Introduction

Scholarly publishing has experienced unprecedented levels of pressure and scrutiny over the last two decades. Changes in technology, researcher and reader practices, attitudes about open access (OA), economic circumstances and funder requirements, among other factors, have collectively disrupted the scholarly publishing sector. In 2000 Stanley Chodorow, then chair of the Board of Directors of the Council on Library and Information Resources, summarized this context, writing, 'Our system of scholarly communication is in trouble. Its economy has changed, and its technology is changing. The economy no longer provides adequate support for the scholarly monograph and has made the market for journals chaotic. Technological change is undermining the traditional functions and business of publishing and is giving individual scholars new choices: to publish in traditional print or in electronic journals. Some scholars are already discussing ways the technology might free them from the traditional system of scholarly communication.'¹

In the intervening years, technology has continued to make publishing easier, less expensive and more dynamic. Researchers have increasingly produced new modes of scholarship, gray literature and informal or supplementary research outputs. Journal prices have continued to escalate, particularly in the hard sciences. High author fees for OA journals, slow publication timelines and restrictive licenses have led to ongoing frustration with some of the practices of large commercial publishers.² Stagnant or decreasing subsidies for university presses have put pressure on humanities monograph publishing. As Kathleen Fitzpatrick noted in 2009, 'The universities that are still able to subsidize the presses they host do so in a fairly miniscule fashion; as of 2004 the average subsidy received by a university press from its host institution represented less than 8% of its annual budget.'³

Meanwhile, libraries have been mindfully and strategically shifting their roles on campus. Leveraging their existing skill sets and infrastructure, libraries have launched, for example, data management programs, digital preservation initiatives, copyright and author advisory services, all in response to new or evolving campus needs. Library-based publishing services have likewise emerged organically over the past several decades, largely in response to the perceived gaps in and frustrations with the current publishing system described above. As Karla Hahn observed in 2008, 'Service development is being driven by campus demand, largely from authors and editors. Scholars and researchers are taking their unmet needs to the library.'⁴



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Now, dozens if not hundreds of other academic and research libraries are leading a growing movement to enhance scholarly publishing for the benefit of researchers, libraries and the academy. They are working locally and collectively to develop innovative, sustainable economic models as well as experimenting with new technologies that push the boundaries of digital publishing. Library-based publishing complements the activities of other scholarly publishers, including commercial publishers and university presses, and offers new, open and sustainable models for publishing academic research. This article offers an overview of library publishing activity, primarily in the US, followed by an account of the creation and mission of the Library Publishing Coalition (LPC), the first professional association dedicated wholly to the support of library publishers.

'Library-based publishing complements the activities of other scholarly publishers, including commercial publishers and university presses'

Defining library publishing in an evolving context

Library-based publishing is perhaps better defined by its motivations than its outputs. Libraries generally aspire to provide an alternative publishing model for authors and editors that favors OA and less restrictive licensing. They aim to preserve and disseminate the scholarly output of their campus communities and fill gaps in the current scholarly publishing system by providing publishing or simple hosting services for gray literature and informal publications such as conference proceedings, data, blogs, electronic theses and dissertations, and preprints. Finally, many libraries are motivated by the potential of collaboration with existing campus publishing operations such as the university press for mutual benefit.

The LPC's own definition of library publishing, written collectively by its members, hints at the difficulty of establishing clear boundaries around what constitutes 'library publishing'. The LPC defines library publishing as: '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.'⁵

In their 2015 report tracing the origins of library publishing, Okerson and Holzman point out that library publishing 'describes a broad spectrum of activities. At one end are large and established enterprises ... (with peer review, sophisticated budgets, marketing plans, business goals, and so on), but there is no agreement where to draw the line for the other end of the spectrum (for example, grey literature, data-sets, articles in institutional repositories).'

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As Okerson and Holzman indicate, academic and research libraries primarily publish scholarly work, but formats run the gamut from formal publications like e-journals and monographs to gray literature. One point of commonality among library publishers is a general focus on locally produced scholarship. It is worth noting that publishing is also a phenomenon in public libraries in the US, where it tends more often towards local history and fiction. In some ways, publishing in academic libraries recalls the mandates of early university presses, which primarily published the faculty members of their own universities. While university presses now generally avoid this practice so as not to appear to be vanity publishers, libraries have embraced it as part of their stewarding role for campus scholarly output. For example, an LPC survey found that libraries collectively published a total of 404 journal titles for their campus faculty over the course of 2014-2015, compared with 189 journal titles under contract (or memorandum of understanding) for external groups.⁷ External groups with whom libraries regularly partner include scholarly societies, museums, and faculty members at other institutions. A handful of libraries will

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188 provide publishing services under contract to any partner.⁸ Libraries have also enthusiastically taken up publication of undergraduate scholarship in a variety of forms, from e-journals and conference proceedings to student websites.

Library publishing often develops organically from the existing infrastructure and staffing related to a library's institutional repository. Forty-eight libraries (42% of respondents) in the 2016 edition of the *Library Publishing Directory* use bepress Digital Commons repository as their publishing platform, while another 36 libraries (31%) use DSpace. Staff associated with the repository often add publishing to their existing portfolio of responsibilities, though many libraries are creating new positions that expressly include publishing functions.⁹

Like their activities, library publishers are diverse. They include large, research-intensive universities, both public and private, as well as many of North America's comprehensive universities (regional public universities focusing primarily or exclusively on undergraduate- and master's-level education) and small, private liberal arts colleges.

Library publishing has manifested differently in the US than in other regions of the world. The UK, Germany and Australia have witnessed the revitalization of university presses as an integral part of the university library. This phenomenon is less common, though not unheard of, in the US. Other presses that have been newly founded by libraries include the Amherst College Press and the Lever Press initiative. Other libraries have established imprints, such as Zea E-Books at the University of Nebraska, or, more commonly, an existing press has been reorganized as part of the library, as in the case of Purdue University Libraries and Press. In the case of presses that are housed within libraries, some are purely administrative relationships, while others have fostered active collaboration and co-operation.

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The Library Publishing Coalition (LPC): from origins to impact

By 2012 library publishing initiatives were becoming more common and more sophisticated. A proliferation of research and commentary concerning library publishing ensued. However, the IMLS-funded *Library Publishing Services: Strategies for Success* report 'showed that most of these programs were built in ad hoc ways and operated in relative isolation from one another.'¹⁰ The report concluded that this 'silozation' threatened to limit the impact these initiatives could expect to have on the larger scholarly communications and academic library sectors. Mobilized by this prospect, Purdue University Libraries, the University of North Texas Libraries and Virginia Tech Libraries, in partnership with the Educopia Institute, spearheaded the creation of a new professional organization intended to bridge the gaps between these disparate efforts. The new organization would promote knowledge-sharing and networking, raise the visibility and credibility of library publishers within the scholarly communication and academic library communities, and facilitate resource sharing and collaboration.

Beginning in January 2013, the LPC undertook a two-year start-up process that engaged 60 academic and research libraries in the US and Canada in the task of envisioning and building a new professional association to meet their needs.¹¹ Sixty libraries committed to provide two years of seed funding to the initiative. This funding primarily financed the salary of a community facilitator, the creation of a website and other organizational branding and marketing materials, the co-ordination of an international conference and overhead costs assessed by the Educopia Institute for administration of the project. Soliciting investment from stakeholders (rather than waiting for grant funding) was a deliberate decision designed to give founding members ownership of and investment in the organization and its future. This community-centered, ground-up approach to founding the organization was enabled by engaging two community facilitators: the author (Sarah Kalikman Lippincott, the LPC's Director), and Katherine Skinner (Executive Director of the Educopia Institute). The community facilitators cultivated engagement, balanced voices and promoted an inclusive environment, and managed the procedural aspects of this collective endeavor.

189 Over the two-year period, the 60 founding and contributing members (defined by different levels of financial investment) collectively drafted by-laws and membership requirements for the organization, established a nine-member governing Board elected from among the membership, and prioritized the organization's activities.

Understanding the state of the field and building an inventory of library publishing approaches became an early priority for the community. In 2013 we conducted our first international survey of library publishers. The survey results were published in the form of our first *Library Publishing Directory*, with an expressed aim 'to articulate the unique value of library publishing; to establish it as a significant and growing community of practice; and to raise its visibility within a number of stakeholder communities, including administrators, funding agencies, other scholarly publishers, librarians, and content creators.'¹² As relative newcomers to the scholarly publishing space, librarians may not have all the requisite skills to plan and manage a publishing program. Professional development was therefore also named a high priority for the organization. Finally, the membership prioritized activities that encourage knowledge-sharing and networking, including the establishment of a members-only listserv, a shared library of model and procedural documents, a job board, an annual in-person conference, and regular informal gatherings at other national events.

Today, the LPC counts 66 member libraries in the US, Canada and Australia. Forty-four of the LPC's members are part of public, land grant, or regional comprehensive universities. The remaining 22 are at private institutions, including private research universities (18) and small liberal arts colleges (four). Around a dozen of the LPC's member libraries function as the administrative home of a university press. This figure includes presses founded by the library, as in the case of New Prairie Press at the University of Kansas, as well as university presses that have been administratively reorganized within the library, as in the case of Oregon State University. We are actively seeking partners in the UK and Europe, which have also seen a renewed interest in publishing within the academy and a revitalization and repositioning of university presses.

'We are actively seeking partners in the UK and Europe'

As the field matures, it is experiencing the type of change the LPC's founders envisioned: moving from ad hoc, local efforts to collaborative initiatives that span libraries, national borders, and even sectors. Sustainability and new financial models have become a particularly fruitful area for collaboration. Library publishing is generally subsidized entirely by the library's operating budget, meaning libraries are free in a sense from the budget pressures faced by for-profit or cost-recovering publishers. However, these subsidies may not be guaranteed over the long term and may not be sizable enough to finance growth and experimentation. Library publishers and their partners are therefore already exploring new models of financial sustainability, working in co-operation with one another or with other likeminded partners to benefit from economies of scale and shared expertise. Stanford University's John Willinsky, for example, is leading a study to determine the feasibility of a 'multi-stakeholder cooperative association involving journals, research libraries, publishers, portals, funding agencies, and others'.¹³ Michigan University, Amherst College and a consortium of small liberal arts colleges in the US have undertaken the Lever Press initiative, which will build a new press, financed by the partners.

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Now in its third year, the LPC is interested not just in community building but community bridging, supporting our members as they identify areas for collaboration not only among libraries but between libraries and their counterparts in the scholarly communication sector. This effort to bridge communities recognizes that library publishing is just one response to gaps in and frustrations with the scholarly communication system. Library publishing exists in tandem with initiatives like the Open Library of Humanities, Knowledge Unlatched, and Unglue.it, which co-ordinate new funding models of monographs; as well as a new breed of non-profit publisher like Ubiquity Press and Open Book Publishers, that operate with lightweight

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190 workflows and a focus on open access and open licenses. We also exist alongside other scholarly publishing and academic library professional associations, and a range of other non-profit associations that deal in issues relating to data, the digital humanities and OA.

Conclusion

Library publishing belongs to an interrelated set of responses to the contemporary scholarly communication ecosystem. Libraries have embraced publishing as a natural and complementary aspect of their portfolio of services and as an opportunity to enhance the publishing options available to scholars. Responding to current gaps in scholarly publishing, libraries are providing necessary services to host and disseminate gray literature, data sets, theses and dissertations, and new media. They are publishing niche and esoteric work that is unlikely to find a market. They are supporting experimental and student work. Finally, a growing number are publishing high quality, peer-reviewed e-journals and monographs on a par with university press and commercial scholarly publishers' outputs. The LPC supports the efforts of library publishers by providing the infrastructure for networking and knowledge sharing, by raising the visibility of the field, and by promoting collaboration with other stakeholders in the publishing sector.

'The LPC supports the efforts of library publishers'

Abbreviations and Acronyms

A list of the abbreviations and acronyms used in this and other *Insights* articles can be accessed here – click on the URL below and then select the Abbreviations and Acronyms link at the top of the page it directs you to: <http://www.uksg.org/publications#aa>

Competing Interests

The author has declared no competing interests.

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