

UNIVERSITY PUBLISHING IN A DIGITAL AGE: HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ITHAKA REPORT

by Laura Brown, former President of Oxford University Press USA; Rebecca Griffiths, Director of Strategic Services, Ithaka; and Matthew Rascoff, Strategic Services Analyst, Ithaka

In the fall of 2006, we launched a study to examine US university presses and their role in scholarly publishing. The study evolved into a broader assessment of the importance of publishing to universities, culminating in the July 2007 report, "University Publishing in a Digital Age."¹ By publishing we mean simply the communication and broad dissemination of knowledge, a function that has become both more complex and more important with the introduction and rapid evolution of digital and networking technologies. There is a seemingly limitless range of opportunities for a faculty member to distribute his or her work, from setting up a Web page or blog, to posting an article to a working-paper Web site or institutional repository, to including it in a peer-reviewed journal or book. In American colleges and universities, access to the Internet and World Wide Web is ubiquitous; consequently nearly all intellectual effort results in some form of "publishing." Yet universities do not treat the publishing function as an important, mission-centric endeavor. Publishing generally receives little attention from senior leadership at universities and the result has been a scholarly publishing industry that many in the university community find to be increasingly out of step with the important values of the academy.

As information technology transforms the landscape of scholarly publishing, it is critical that universities deploy the full range of their resources—faculty research and teaching activity, library collections, IT capacity, and publishing expertise—in ways that best serve both local interests and the broader public interest. In this report we argue that a renewed commitment to publishing in its broadest sense can enable universities to more fully realize the potential global impact of their academic programs, enhance the reputations of their specific institutions, maintain a strong voice in determining what constitutes important scholarship and which scholars deserve recognition, and in some cases reduce costs. There seems to us to be a pressing and urgent need to revitalize the university's publishing role and capabilities in this digital age.

The study was sponsored by JSTOR and Ithaka and was led by Laura Brown, former president of Oxford University Press USA, in collaboration with Ithaka's Strategic Services group.² This is not a report presenting findings from an objective, empirical survey of the field. Instead, it is a qualitative review, informed by a survey

and interviews as well as the knowledge of the investigators. We began this project with a set of hypotheses and views based on our own experience and prior discussions with people in the community. These hypotheses were tested through an extensive series of interviews with university administrators, press directors, librarians, and other stakeholders on campus. We also conducted a survey of press directors to understand better their relationships to their host institutions, progress in getting online, and ability to develop new programs. Some of what we learned through this process confirmed our sense of how the world is changing, but we also heard views that we had not expected. We were particularly surprised by how critical many were of university presses and the difficulties they have had in adapting.

What the World Looks Like and Where We Are Headed

Formal scholarly publishing is characterized by a process of selection, editing, printing, and distribution of an author's content by an intermediary (preferably one with some name recognition). Informal scholarly publishing, by comparison, is the dissemination of content (sometimes called "gray literature") that generally has not passed through these processes, such as working papers, lecture notes, student newsletters, etc. In the past decade, the range and importance of the latter has dramatically expanded through information technology. Scholars increasingly turn to preprint servers, blogs, e-mail lists, and institutional repositories, to share their work, ideas, data, opinions, and critiques. These forms of informal publication have become pervasive in the university and college environment. As scholars rely more heavily on these channels to share and find information, the boundaries between formal and informal publication will blur. These changes in the behavior of scholars will require changes in the approaches universities take to all kinds of publishing.

Universities have traditionally participated in the formal publication of their intellectual output through a network of presses, though most publishing of this output, especially in the sciences, has long taken place outside the university sector. For a variety of reasons, university presses have become less integrated with the core activities and missions of their campuses over the years—a drift that threatens to continue as information technology transforms the landscape of scholarly publishing. The responsibility for disseminating digital scholarship is migrating instead in two other directions.

One direction is toward large (primarily commercial) publishing platforms that offer economies of scale in crucial areas, such as aggregation of content, technology development, and marketing. There are risks associated with this strategy. Highly specialized scholars produce research that may be of interest to only a small number of

peers, and its commercial value is quite low. The value in terms of scholarship, however, may be much higher—and in some cases the impact is not evident for years or even decades after the research is first published. This kind of scholarship may be overlooked by for-profit publishers. Moreover, the segmented nature of the scholarly communications marketplace exacerbates the power of the largest publishing entities to exploit highly resilient niche “monopolies”—some use their market power to raise prices.

The second direction is toward informal channels operated by other entities on campus, primarily libraries, academic computing centers, academic departments, and cross-institutional research centers. These entities can all play a critical role in scholarly communications³ and bring new skills and resources to the table, but they are relatively new to the publishing realm. University presses have developed publishing skills and experience over many years that are also very valuable in this new context and that would be costly, if not impossible, to replicate. Furthermore, university-based and other not-for-profit presses are accustomed to grappling with the often conflicting claims of scholarship and cost recovery. If these publishers disappear, authors will be left with fewer and perhaps less desirable options, and many universities will not have a place at the table.

Publishing in the future will look very different than it has looked in the past. Consumption patterns have already changed dramatically, as many scholars have increasingly begun to rely on electronic resources to obtain information that is useful to their research and teaching. In fact, we have heard from many scholars that, from the perspective of today’s students, “if it isn’t electronic, it doesn’t exist.” Transformation on the creation and production sides is taking longer, but ultimately may have an even more profound impact on the way scholars work. Publishers have made progress putting their legacy content online, especially with journals. We believe the next stage will be the creation of new formats made possible by digital technologies, ultimately allowing scholars to work in deeply integrated electronic research and publishing environments. These environments will provide tools and resources for conducting research, collaborating with peers, manipulating data sets, and publishing working papers and conference papers. They will support real-time dissemination, dynamically updated content, and multimedia formats, as scholars increasingly seek to incorporate video and audio in their research and teaching.

Alongside these changes in content creation and publication, universities must revisit traditional views about how publishing is supported. The actors in the new system may be different, especially with user-

generated content. Already, alternative distribution models (institutional repositories, preprint servers, open access journals) are emerging with the aim to broaden access, reduce costs, and enable open sharing of content. Different economic models will be appropriate for different types of content and different audiences. It seems critical to us that there continue to be a diverse marketplace for publishing a range of content, from fee-based to open access, from peer reviewed to self-published, from single author to collaboratively created, from simple text to rich media. This marketplace should involve commercial and not-for-profit entities, and should include collaborations among libraries, presses, and academic computing centers.

What will, or should, the future scholarly communications system look like? First, every university that produces research should have a publishing strategy. Second, the actors will change. Much of the content produced in the future will be disseminated electronically, and a new constellation of skills (including those that currently reside in presses, libraries, and IT groups) will be required to do this most effectively. University presses will have to change. Some universities will encourage and enable their presses to grow and take more of a leadership role. Other institutions may decide to open new presses. Others may close their presses or let their presses evolve into more specialized enterprises with a focus on editorial and credentialing services while depending on external entities for core infrastructure and marketing services. What seems clear is that to succeed presses are going to need to be a more important partner in helping their host institutions to fulfill their research and teaching mission. Third, in the digital environment certain activities and assets (e.g., technology development, marketing) will be consolidated onto large-scale platforms. These new digital publishing activities are central to the research and teaching missions of universities, and it therefore seems critically important that the university community be able to influence strongly the development of these platforms to ensure that they support long-held university values, rather than allowing them to be driven primarily by commercial incentives.

Role of Libraries

Among the librarians consulted for this study, we perceived a high level of energy and excitement about the “reinvention” of the librarian’s mission. This reinvented mission involves a combination of:

- serving faculty research, teaching, and publishing agendas (building collections to support faculty research, providing tools, delivering everything they want to the desktop, developing technological expertise for their publishing projects, supporting the infrastructure for their courses);

- serving student study needs (creating new physical and virtual spaces for private and group work, helping students to become more efficient researchers);
- preservation (supporting digital archiving efforts);
- making scholarship available to the wider world (open access, digitizing special collections);
- lowering the cost of scholarship (alternative publishing, legal experts to negotiate contracts); and
- supporting scholarly communications (providing robust online collections, creating research environments that will help faculty and graduate students create the scholarship of the future, finding ways for the institution to take back more control and lower the cost of scholarship, and developing infrastructure and tools to enable multimedia).

Increasingly, these roles bleed into what might be considered “publishing.” The role of librarians has always been, in part, to provide services to the local community that help them find information, or learn how to find information. With the advent of online resources, librarians developed skills in accessing and managing online data. It therefore is not surprising that many faculty members and students have turned to librarians for assistance in producing electronic resources. At the same time, several librarians conceded to us that they are good at organizing information but lack expertise in choosing or prioritizing what merits publication. Libraries provide tools and infrastructure to support new forms of informal publishing, but these tend to be inward focused (toward the home institution) rather than externally focused (toward the best scholarship in a given discipline), limiting their appeal to users. Attempts by librarians to create new online resources by digitizing special collections often fail to take into consideration the potential market for those materials or what is really needed. Likewise, librarians have limited skills and

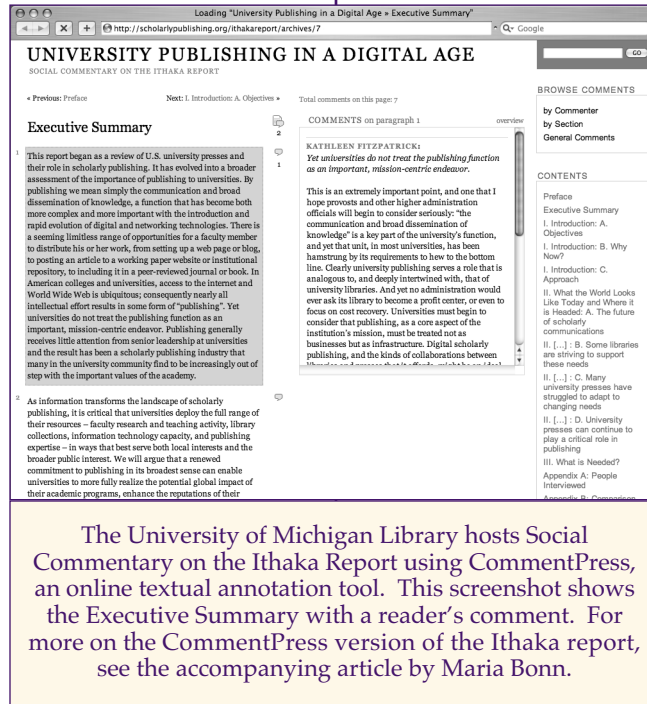
experience in marketing content to build awareness and usage. And library publishing options lack the prestige that a university press imprint confers on scholarship. These are all areas in which the librarians consulted believe that university presses can play an important and ongoing role.

Role of University Presses

Presses are facing a growing set of formidable challenges: their printed products have experienced waning demand, more library acquisition resources are expended on scientific journal literature distributed by large publishers, the open access movement is contesting the traditional business model of publishing, and administrators are increasingly looking to other parts of campus to assume publishing-related responsibilities for digital content. While many presses have been remarkably nimble in making do on a diet of modest subsidies, shoestring budgets, and programs that painstakingly try to balance cost-recovery goals and scholarly value, those days may be numbered.

One issue is that over time, and in pursuit of the largest public service to the global academic community, presses have tended to grow disconnected from the administrations at their own campuses. This is due in part to the fact that they primarily publish works from scholars located at other institutions. As a result, university presses are viewed by their administration as largely a general service function for higher education, not as adding value to their local institutions. Commitment to their longevity therefore tends to be low.

The second issue is that university presses have struggled to develop workable business models for publishing electronically. As journals have gone online, many have migrated to commercial platforms that offered more attractive terms and services than university presses could provide. We are concerned that monographs and, perhaps more importantly, new forms of scholarship will follow a similar path. Scholars in certain disciplines rely heavily on university presses for their credentialing, and it is not clear that commercial publishers would serve the needs of authors as well.



The University of Michigan Library hosts Social Commentary on the Ithaka Report using CommentPress, an online textual annotation tool. This screenshot shows the Executive Summary with a reader's comment. For more on the CommentPress version of the Ithaka report, see the accompanying article by Maria Bonn.

What Needs to Be Done

In our interviews we detected significant detachment from administrators about publishing's connection to their core mission; a high level of energy and excitement from the librarians we consulted about reinventing their roles on campus to meet the evolving needs of their constituents; and a wide range of responses from press directors, from those who are continuing to do what they have always done, to those who are actively reconnecting with their host institutions' academic programs and engaging in collaborative efforts to develop new electronic products. Many press directors have a sense of what needs to be done to jump-start their new enterprises, but lack the financial capital, technical staff, and technological skills to pursue this kind of agenda. Librarians and press directors acknowledge that they have limited experience in collaborating effectively with one another and operate on different business models that make collaboration challenging. At the same time, we found that they have an appreciation for the unique skills and experience that each brings to the table.

Administrators, librarians, and presses each have a role to play (as do scholars, though this report is not directed at them). The vision put forward in the full report is unlikely to materialize without leadership from these three constituents, particularly from presidents and provosts. Due to the siloed structure of universities, real collaboration is difficult to enact without impetus from the top. We encourage senior administrators to embrace the fact that in this digital era, publishing, broadly defined, is an integral part of the core mission and activities of universities, and to take ownership of it. They should take inventory of the landscape of publishing activities underway within their universities to understand how resources are currently being used. They should work with librarians, press directors, IT directors, and faculty to develop a strategic approach to publishing, encompassing what publication services should be provided to their constituents, how these services should be provided and funded, how publishing contributes to their institution's reputation, how publishing should relate to tenure decisions, and what their position on intellectual assets should be. Finally, they should create the organizational structures necessary to implement this strategy and leverage the resources of the university. These parties should work together to create a shared electronic publishing infrastructure that will save costs, create scale, leverage expertise, innovate, extend the brand of US higher education, create an interlinked environment of information, and provide a robust alternative to commercial competitors.

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ENCOURAGING PUBLIC COMMENTARY ON THE ITHAKA REPORT

by Maria Bonn, Director, Scholarly Publishing Office, University of Michigan Library

On July 26, 2007, Ithaka released "University Publishing in a Digital Age."¹ The academic community has received the report with great interest and lively discussion.

Coincidentally, that same week, the Institute for the Future of the Book released CommentPress, an online textual annotation tool with great promise for promoting scholarly discussion and collaboration.²

At the Scholarly Publishing Office of the University of Michigan Library³ we have watched both of these developments with keen interest. Our work as online scholarly publishers, our role as publisher of the *Journal of Electronic Publishing*,⁴ and our close affiliation with the University of Michigan Press through our joint initiative, digitalculturebooks,⁵ direct us to pay close attention to both the conditions and tools of scholarly publishing.

The happy simultaneity of the release of the Ithaka report and CommentPress prompted us to view the report as ideal material with which to experiment with CommentPress. With the cooperation of the authors of the report, we have created a version of "University Publishing in a Digital Age" that invites public commentary and that we hope will serve as a basis for further discussions in our community.

We are watching this experiment with interest. In the first three weeks that the Ithaka report was available in CommentPress, this version of the report was viewed thousands of times. We received dozens and dozens of e-mails and verbal reports from members of the academic community noting their enthusiasm for the projects. And yet, the discussion the report invites has been relatively quiet. We look forward to seeing if the level of discussion remains constant or increases and to performing some analysis to see what this experiment can teach us about the appropriate alignment of content, user communities, and technology.

The Scholarly Publishing Office's version of the Ithaka report is available for comment at <http://scholarlypublishing.org/ithakareport/>. We welcome your feedback, both on the report itself and on the value of its expression in CommentPress.

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¹ Laura Brown, Rebecca Griffiths, Matthew Rascoff, "University Publishing in a Digital Age," Ithaka Report, July 26, 2007, <http://www.ithaka.org/strategic-services/university-publishing/>.

² <http://www.futureofthebook.org/commentpress/>

³ <http://spo.umdl.umich.edu/>

⁴ <http://journalofelectronicpublishing.org/>

⁵ <http://www.digitalculture.org/>

Clearly this is too ambitious an agenda for institutions to pursue individually. Creating these sorts of platforms requires scale and investment of substantial capital, and commercial entities are far ahead of the university sector in investing the necessary level of resources. Each institution must determine what it can do locally, and if and when it should combine forces with other institutions. One of the objectives of this study was to gauge the community's interest in a possible collective investment in a technology platform to support innovation in university-based, mission-driven publishing. This infrastructure could serve as the foundation for new forms of university-centered academic publishing in the digital age. We heard a strong sense that a new third-party enterprise or at least a catalytic force is needed to: facilitate the investment of capital; lead the community toward a shared vision of the scholarly communications landscape; help institutions find their place in that new system; marshal the necessary ongoing resources; and help motivate collaboration both within campuses and across institutions.

— Copyright © 2007 Laura Brown, Rebecca Griffiths, and Matthew Rascoff

¹ The full report is available at <http://www.ithaka.org/strategic-services/university-publishing/>.

² Laura Brown is a JSTOR Trustee, and Kevin Guthrie, who is president of Ithaka and contributed extensively to this report, serves as JSTOR's chairman. Both Ithaka and JSTOR are keenly interested in the current state and future of scholarly publishing, and the Strategic Services group of Ithaka specializes in gathering, analyzing, and sharing information on topics at the intersection of higher education and technology.

³ In the past, terms such as "scholarly communications" and "scholarly publishing" were often used to depict research outputs that met certain criteria, such as certification, selection, and preservation. We argue here that the lines between formal and informal publication are breaking down, and thus the definitions of these terms are in flux. We use them in this paper to refer to the broad spectrum of ways that scholars share their research with one another.

UNIVERSITY RESEARCH PUBLISHING OR DISTRIBUTION STRATEGIES?

by David Shulenburg, Vice President for Academic Affairs
National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC)

The following remarks were presented by the author at the 151st ARL Membership Meeting in Washington DC on October 11, 2007.

I will focus my remarks on a narrow slice of "University Publishing in a Digital Age," specifically on the paper's recommendation that universities develop research publishing strategies.

What will, or should, the future scholarly communications system look like? First, every university that produces research should have a publishing strategy, but that does not mean that it should have a "press."

— Laura Brown, Rebecca Griffiths, and Matthew Rascoff, "University Publishing in a Digital Age," Ithaka Report, July 26, 2007, pg. 4, <http://www.ithaka.org/strategic-services/university-publishing/>.

When I read the paper I was not familiar with any NASULGC university's formal research publishing strategy, so I inquired of 215 NASULGC provosts, primarily provosts of the nation's large, public, research universities, providing context and repeating the normative statement of Brown, et al.: "...every university that produces research should have a publishing strategy..."

My query to the provosts was:

Does your university have a formal, written research publishing strategy? If so, would you please email that document to me? If your university has a well understood but unwritten research publishing strategy, would you send me an email briefly outlining its elements? If your university has neither, would you simply reply with the words "No strategy"?

The overwhelming majority of provosts who responded replied, "No strategy."

Of those responding affirmatively, all but a few submitted only faculty evaluation policies detailing the role of published research in evaluation.

Among the few exceptions are a couple of notable ones: one University of California provost, in addition to sending a faculty evaluation policy, appropriately suggested that their system's strategy may come to include the policy under consideration that requires submission of published work to an open access repository unless the faculty member specifically opts out.