

[Navigating the Changing Landscape of Scholarly Book Publishing in Literary and Cultural Studies, Part 4](#)

Discussion published by Catherine Cocks on Thursday, April 21, 2022

A post from [Feeding the Elephant: A Forum for Scholarly Communications](#).

This post was developed from a virtual panel conversation that took place at the Modern Language Association 2022 meeting in January, organized by the [MLA Publications Committee](#). Throughout the week, the Elephant will publish one post per day from each of the six interlocutors on the themes of Change, Generations, Experiments, Open, Fit, and Labor. As always, readers are invited to continue the conversation in the comments. -Eds.

Open

Mahinder Kingra, editorial director, Cornell University Press

University presses have always looked for ways to get our books into the hands of as many readers as possible. For decades, that was most efficiently done through academic libraries, which routinely purchased most of the monographs we published and in quantities that covered, at a minimum, our costs in publishing them. Due to a number of factors (several of which Jennifer mentioned in her piece), sales of print monographs to libraries declined precipitously and ebook sales were unable to make up the difference, which has made it very challenging for publishers to recover the costs of publishing them.

The Open Access initiatives for publishing monographs that have coalesced over the past five years provide publishers with one way to sustain their primary mission—publishing the best scholarship for the widest possible readership—while also providing a number of funding models for doing so. (The Elephant summarized several of these [here](#).)

What are the benefits of Open Access?

A major one is wider availability of your work in communities, regions, and countries where your publisher is not able to distribute print books or readers are not able to afford them. Although North America and Europe remain the largest markets for Open Access use, Cornell has seen its OA books downloaded in significant numbers in South and Southeast Asia, North and Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America (especially Brazil), and China. Wider availability also means more citations, more classroom use, and more inspiration for other scholars.

What are the current OA funding models?

The most prominent OA funding model for monographs is TOME, an acronym for [Toward an Open](#)

[Monograph Ecosystem](#), a collaboration among the Association of American Universities, the Association of Research Libraries, and the Association of University Presses. The 20 participating TOME universities commit to providing a limited number of \$15,000 grants to their faculty to support the Open Access publication of their work by a university press. As of early 2022, over 100 TOME-supported OA monographs have been published by 23 UPs.

People frequently ask how that amount—\$15,000—was determined. Various studies, as well as the experiences of publishers themselves, have determined that it costs university presses \$20,000 to \$24,000 to publish the typical monograph. (For more on these studies, see [this post](#).) This figure accounts for both the direct costs to produce the book (copy editing, layout and design, and printing), as well as all of the costs surrounding the book (marketing, order fulfillment), and overhead like salaries and building maintenance. Publishers hope—increasingly in vain—that over the long term, sales of the book will cover most of those costs. The TOME model (which has set the current level of funding support for OA) promises to cover 75% of the cost of publishing a monograph, while assuming that the publisher will recover the remaining costs through sales of the print edition, usually a reasonably priced paperback.

TOME is not the only OA monograph model, of course. [MIT Press](#) and the [University of Michigan Press](#), for example, have launched plans that invite libraries to invest in making all of the monographs they publish in a year OA by offering subscribing institutions access to their digital backlists. Some university presses, like Amherst College Press, are entirely Open Access, with funding provided by their host institutions. And [Cambridge UP](#) has a delayed OA model that opens up a select number of monographs once a sales target has been met.

Many see these models as being more equitable than TOME and similar programs that require either authors or institutions to provide \$15,000 subsidies. That inequity is the most concerning issue surrounding Open Access: That only the work of authors based at the largest institutions will be available as OA books. And this is the challenge for publishers and funding institutions to address over the next five years. The NEH has proposed one solution: Its Open Book program provides publishers with \$5500 to make NEH-sponsored research monographs Open Access up to three years *after* publication, allowing the publishers to recover some or even most of their costs before the ebooks are made freely available. (Of the \$5500 provided by the NEH, \$500 goes to the author to make up for lost ebook royalties.) But devising a sustainable model to publish more than a fraction of all monographs OA will require significant changes to the academic publishing ecosystem.

Open Access, Peer Review, and Tenure & Promotion

At Cornell and every other university press, OA books are treated no differently than paywalled books in terms of peer review, copy editing, layout, design, and marketing. In addition, we, like every other UP, publish print editions of OA books simultaneously with the ebook editions, and we strive to keep the list price of the print edition low, in order to encourage readers who access the ebook for free to also buy a print edition if they want. Like our paywalled books, our OA books are sent out for review, nominated for prizes, and displayed at conferences.

One early concern about OA, especially for first books, was whether having a book published Open Access would hinder tenure and promotion, and we used to encourage authors in that position to

check with their department chairs first. OA no longer seems to carry that stigma, but it's always worth checking before committing to OA.

Open Access at Cornell UP

- We currently publish 12-15 new OA books per year, though it is our hope to increase this to a far greater percentage of our list if we can secure the financial support.
- We have 210 OA titles in print, of which 175 are backlist titles that had gone out of print and were revived as Open Access ebooks and print-on-demand paperbacks through a grant from the NEH. Selected in concert with Cornell University Library subject specialists, these titles have taken on new life as Open Access ebooks, with most seeing between 2000 and 4000 downloads.
- Cornell makes its OA ebooks available on several platforms: Our own website, Project MUSE, JSTOR, and DeGruyter, and most significantly in terms of visibility and use, through Amazon, Google Books, and other ebook retailers.
- Our German Studies series, Signale, is funded in such a way that books published in the series become Open Access four years after paywalled publication.

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Have something to say on this topic? Reply to this post or [email the Elephant](#) about writing for us. We welcome submissions from stakeholders on all sides of scholarly publishing.