Varieties of University Press Business Models V: Open Access

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Guest post from Feeding the Elephant: A Forum for Scholarly Communications.

Guest post by Beth M. Bouloukos, director of the Amherst College Press.

This post is part of a series on how university presses (and other scholarly nonprofit publishers) are organized and operated. If you've got a model you'd like to describe, we'd like to hear from you.

Amherst College Press (ACP) is unique among university presses for being housed in a liberal arts college; it is unusual in publishing using a platinum open access (OA) model, meaning there is no cost to our authors or their institutions to publish with us. Amherst College published books under the ACP name decades ago, but we published our first peer reviewed, born open access book in 2015. In its current incarnation, ACP is housed in and funded by the library.

We have a close working relationship with our library colleagues, not only because they are our founders and funders but also because they are enthusiastic collaborators in our mission.

The librarians view the funding for the press as a tangible expression of their support for access to information and believe that investing in titles—on the front end—that will benefit all is a good use of their resources. While ACP publishes everything as digital, open-access works, we also make physical copies of our books available for sale at the lowest possible cost.

As ACP is a newer press, we were able to purposefully develop our lists to reflect the teaching, art, and archival strengths of the campus. The press publishes titles in art history and visual studies, Latin American studies, literary studies, music, and Russian, East European, and Eurasian studies. Within all of those fields we have an interest in work that highlights queer, feminist, and anti-racist topics and approaches. Our deep interest in interdisciplinary scholarship within and among these fields aligns us with the ethos of small liberal arts colleges. Commitments to interdisciplinarity have also led us to form publishing partnerships with organizations that align with our mission and list interests: we publish and host the peer reviewed annual volume of the Video Game Art Gallery, a Chicago-based collective of game makers and scholars. We also co-publish books in collaboration with the renowned Vera List Center for Art and Politics at the New School.

Another partnership that has been important for us is with the Fulcrum team at Michigan Publishing.
Services, which developed and hosts the electronic publishing platform we use. This allows us to acquire books that are best served by multimodal OA publishing. For example, our Electronic Communities of Making series promotes thoughtful reflection on the communities and practices driving electronic creativity by publishing works that reach across electronic literature, game studies, and internet research to explore the intersection of theory, practice, and pedagogy.

Because we are located on a small campus, we work closely with our institution’s faculty, students, and even alumni. ACP partners with centers and departments across Amherst College on programming and events: we hold twice yearly salons at the Center for Humanistic Inquiry, for example, and have worked with the Amherst Center for Russian Culture, the Mead Art Museum, and the Emily Dickinson Museum, as well as the college’s Alumni and Parents office.

ACP has a year-long internship program that gives Amherst undergraduates robust pre-professional training and a substantive introduction to scholarly publishing. More information, including resources developed by our interns, can be found on the Community Page on our website. The work of the press has recently even been integrated into the curriculum via an upper-level Spanish course. Press staff is teaching the class about scholarly publishing broadly and proposal writing specifically, which will culminate in the students’ final project: researching potential texts to propose for a fledgling translation series.

In its mission to publish scholarly monographs, its alignment with campus strengths, its partnerships with scholarly centers, and its growing involvement in undergraduate professional training, it shares many features of other small university-based publishers. As a platinum OA, digital multimedia publisher tightly woven into the fabric of a small liberal-arts college, ACP stands out among its peer academic presses.

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**Our hope is that our press might serve as a model for others who want to partner with libraries in order to produce platinum OA books.**

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Although there are still inherent inequities in the open access realm, we believe that a model where authors and their institutions are not responsible for fees is a step towards a more equitable OA ecosystem, one in which our current investments in access to content are leveraged for the benefit of all. We truly have a global readership for our titles and our usage numbers eclipse sales figures of traditional books. To learn more about ACP’s OA business model and others, see this collection of case studies hosted on PubPub, which details the business models of a range of OA scholarly book presses.

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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. Find us on Twitter @HNetBookChannel and use the hashtag #FeedingTheElephant.