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Collaborations between Research Libraries and University Presses

The discussion about the working relationship between research libraries and university presses started more than a decade ago. In the past few years, it tended to focus on the significance of forging a collaborative partnership between the two parties. In light of this trend, I launched a study of the collaborations between libraries and presses for the dissemination of scholarly information. I interviewed colleagues involved in library-press collaborations to find out how the two parties had worked together.

Adrian K. Ho

University of Houston Libraries

akho@mail.uh.edu

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Forms of Collaboration

Technological Support:

- The library hosts the online publishing platform for the press's journals.
- The library creates metadata and MARC records for the press's electronic books.
- The library hosts the online publishing platform for the press's books for open access while the press sells the print version of the books at the same time.
- The library reformats some dated publications published by the press, and provides an online platform for open access to them.

Development of Scholarly Resources:

- The library and the press work together to create a topical Web site.
- They work together to develop and maintain a subscription-based database.

Creation of New Services:

- The library and the press create a joint office for collaborative projects.
- They jointly create a new position, the incumbent of which will help faculty explore different channels for digital publishing.
- They discuss and plan for developments in areas such as their changing roles, possible services for scholars and researchers, and new technology for future scholarly communication.

Consultative Service:

- The library participates in a pilot project of the press's new electronic product, and provides feedback to the press.
- The library fills the press in on users' information-seeking behavior for the sake of enhancement of a current electronic product.
- A librarian serves on the press's editorial committee or advisory board.

Issues or Challenges Encountered

Cultural Differences:

- The library tends to focus on serving the community of its host university. The press acquires materials all over academe and market them to the world.
- The library aims at disseminating information to the broadest base. The press publishes selectively.
- The press as a business tends to work with deadlines. The library might not feel the same kind of chronological urgency.
- The library tends to have a liberal view of copyright while the press regards copyright as the exclusive right to promote scholarship.

Operational Issues:

- The library is funded by its host university while the press has to generate incomes to cover 90% of its operational costs. The library and the press run on different operational models.
- The library and the press are not familiar with each other's unique expertise.
- Sometimes the library and the press cannot find common ground.
- There are communication issues because the library and the press are not used to working together.
- There may not be dedicated operating funds for the library-press collaborative project.
- The press has questions about how many of its employees should be involved in the collaborative project.
- The electronic books made available online were written as print books. There are questions about what could be added to the electronic books to enhance their functionality.
- The library and the press do not communicate with other stakeholders regarding the expectations of the collaboration.

How to Address These Issues

Mutual Understanding:

- The library and the press have to acknowledge the cultural differences between them with sympathy and respect. They should learn to appreciate each other's viewpoint and needs.
- The library and the press have to work together and negotiate a partnership agreement, the goals of their collaboration, each partner's responsibilities, the estimated costs of the project, and the transfers of funds between them (if applicable).
- The library and the press have to make compromises.
- There could be various ways to cover the financial aspect so that the collaboration would not incur commercial concerns. It requires careful business planning between the library and the press.
- The library may have to underwrite a higher percentage of the costs incurred by the collaborative project because the press does not have as many resources.
- The library and the press have to ensure that other stakeholders understand and are open to what they are working on.

External Assistance:

- The library can invite the press to library conferences and digital scholarly publishing discussions. That will help the press gain an understanding of the changing landscape of scholarly publishing from other perspectives.
- Sometimes a business consultant would be able to provide assistance for the library and the press.