

# University Presses: Continuity & Change



## **Peter Berkery**

*Has been Executive Director of AAUP since 2013. Berkery comes to AAUP from Oxford University Press, where he has served for the last 4 years as Vice President and Publisher for the US Law Division. Prior to that he worked for Wolters Kluwer for 11 years in a series of positions, publishing works on securities licensing examination training, securities law, taxation, and financial planning. - See more at: <http://www.aapunet.org/about-aaup/aaup-staff/aaup-executive-director#sthash.7DZdy8WS.dpuf>*

While it is always risky to make generalizations about our community, North American university presses (and their publishing colleagues at other non-profit institutions) have reached a tipping point. In support of this proposition, I offer the following data points, upon which I'll expand below:

- University presses are turning their challenges into opportunities.
- University press leadership has undergone a generational shift.
- University presses are increasing their global reach.

To me, what's most exciting about the developments that have led to this sea change is that they all are occurring while university presses remain faithful to their roots, never straying from their historical mission to ensure academic excellence and cultivate knowledge.

It is frequently said in the northern hemisphere that university presses are "in crisis." In fact, if a 1973 issue of the *Journal of Scholarly Communications* is to be believed ("The Crisis in University Press Publishing"), the end has been nigh for well over 40 years now. Of course individual institutions occasionally engage in a misguided effort to withdraw their support for a particular press, and of course all university presses face a common set of operational challenges — what industry doesn't? — but overall we are no more or less in crisis than any other segment of a post-modern economy. Moreover, as I said above, rather than shrinking from these challenges our community has begun to embrace them in new and exciting ways.

(I am duty-bound also to note here that, more often than not, those misguided efforts to terminate institutional support for an individual press backfire and fail.)

How are North American university presses turning their challenges into opportunities? In fact, the list of examples is as long as AAUP's membership roster, but some common themes are:

- Experimenting to develop genuinely sustainable open access publishing models – participating in pilot programs such as Knowledge Unlatched, engaging in constructive dialogue with people exploring the feasibility of reversing the funding model for academic monographs (i.e., from pay-to-read to pay-to-publish).
- Searching for direct new ways to bring value to our institutions — creating internship programs, teaching younger faculty how to get published, supporting library publishing programs.
- Expanding our digital capabilities — obtaining grants to develop digital publishing infrastructure, expanding professional development opportunities for university press staff, supporting digital humanities centers on campus.

And, it's worth reiterating that we are doing these exciting new things all while staying true to our roots and our mission.

Another factor contributing to the new direction being taken by many university presses is the turnover in the director's chair. Over a 24-month



period, 39 AAUP member presses have hired new directors; if you chose to go back 36-months, you would add another 17 to that total. Thus, out of a population of 105 North American members (a figure which excludes member presses with an institutional affiliation other than to a college or university), that's new management at over half of all presses in just three years. Additionally, more than 85% of those transitions were triggered by the retirement of the outgoing director. This new wave of leadership has taken the reins fully cognizant of the transformative changes occurring in both publishing and higher education, and committed to finding new ways of doing business for their presses.

It doesn't end with the corner office, however; I've had the opportunity to visit almost 85 AAUP member presses in my three years as executive director, and without exception the next layer of press management is embracing change with creativity and enthusiasm. Almost overnight, ours has become a community of energetic problem-solvers.

The final harbinger of change for university presses is the globalization of scholarly communications; rather than resist the potential disruptions such a transformation might present, North American university presses have embraced their duty to play a leadership role in effecting change, and to ensure that it is implemented equitably across an increasingly global ecosystem.

At the second annual International Convention of University Presses, held in conjunction with the Frankfurt Book Fair in October 2014, I articulated three aspirational goals that would inform AAUP's efforts to establish a global network of university presses:

- Developing Networks of Collaboration — facilitating the global exchange of ideas, information, and best practices.
- Developing Networks of Communication — raising awareness of increasingly multi-lateral discussions and decisions on policy matters important to university presses (e.g., piracy, freedom to read).
- Developing Networks of Commerce — improving the infrastructure through which university presses can transact business internationally.

Through its participation, and indeed leadership role, in organizations such as Asociación de Editoriales Universitarias de Colombia (ASEUC) and Asociación de Editoriales Universitarias de América Latina y El Caribe (EULAC), I know the staff of the Editorial Universidad del Rosario share many of these same goals, and I wish them and all EULAC representatives at the 2015 Guadalajara Book Fair a successful conference.



