

# **Kahn, Meredith and Christina LaRose. “Conducting a Comprehensive Survey of Publishing Activity at Your Institution.” Library Publishing Forum. Denton, TX. May 18, 2016.**

## **Slide 1**

As library publishers expand their range of services and cultivate partnerships with campus units, finding suitable partners can be a challenge. There is likely a significant amount of publishing activity already happening on your campus, some of which could be better served by the library. But how do you find those existing programs and sort out the ones whose needs best meet your service offerings?

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Before I talk about how we did this survey, I need to take a step back and explain WHY we did this.

In late 2014, the Mellon Foundation awarded a grant to Indiana University (with the University of Michigan as a partner) to study how a system of institutional subventions could be created and managed to support humanities book publishing on our campuses. Our grant was part of a series of activities that Mellon funded related to scholarly communication that year, and they have invested in a number of other initiatives since then. The purpose of the study was threefold—to determine how such a system could be set up, what concerns faculty might have about it, and how it might be funded.

And it's in the context of that last piece of the investigation—how a subvention system might be funded—that they asked us to look at the existing publishing activities on our campus. As we described in great detail in our final report to the Foundation, these particular questions turned out to be rather difficult to answer, and perhaps not even politically desirable or practically feasible. In the end, we recommended that an institutional subvention program not be funded by cannibalizing money from existing campus scholarly communication activities.

But we figured we could determine the location and magnitude of current campus publishing activity. We knew there were units all over campus “doing publishing.” All we had to do was find them.

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We initially approached this task because we had an external funder asking us to do it. But conveniently, this was something our Associate University Librarian and University Press director, Charles Watkinson, had wanted to do anyway. And it's probably something you might want to do, too.

Library publishing is a symbiotic activity. It requires campus partners to thrive, particularly if the library publishing operation is expected to recover costs or generate revenue. Finding these partners from among your own campus units can keep the administrative burden of cost recovery low, as transactions with external partners can be complex from a university accounting standpoint. In addition, local partners can increase the visibility of a library publishing program and help demonstrate its relevance for the campus community. And knowing what kind of publishing activity is happening out there can help you refine your services to meet the particular needs of your campus community.

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We had a number of ideas for how to suss out campus publishing activity at Michigan.

1) U-M is a public institution, which conveniently publishes all of its salary data annually, with names and titles attached. We figured we could comb the annual salary report to find people with titles that sounded publishing related, or search for individuals we knew worked on publishing-related projects in various units.

2) We could look at things like fund codes, project titles, and financial transactions within units to find publishing activities. We figured it wouldn't be hard to get a department to "show us their books," so to speak, and to talk to central University Finance to discover larger expenditures that went through university procurement processes.

3) We could do structured interviews with administrators at the level of schools and colleges to ask questions about publishing activities at a programmatic level. Certainly they'd be willing to tell us about these things, right?

We had lots of ideas. We were optimistic. We thought this was do-able.

However...

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It's complicated!

Remember that idea of looking at salary data? Unfortunately, it's not that simple. The editors at our University of Michigan Press provide a great example of how someone's administrative and working titles don't necessarily match, or even indicate they might work in publishing. Our press editors titles in the publicly available salary data? "Project Manager." If we wouldn't have been able to find even our own press editors in that salary data, it was unlikely we'd be able to find people we didn't already know about.

Oh, and those ideas about looking at the financial records and conducting structured interviews with administrators? Well, unfortunately for us the campus was in the midst of a rather acrimonious discussion about "centralization of services," with our university's faculty governance body passing a resolution against an ongoing campus-wide initiative to move some administrative activities (and their attendant staff) out of campus units and into a shared pool. In short, this was a very bad time to go asking people how much money they were spending on various kinds of activities. For the sake of the larger investigation that was funded by this grant, we couldn't jeopardize goodwill. We still needed to have relatively delicate conversations with faculty and administrators about flipping the model for humanities book publishing, after all.

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So this left us with our last, most labor-intensive idea—web research.

We used some of our available grant funds to hire a graduate student to comb through the websites of campus units, looking for signs of campus publishing activity. We hired a doctoral student named Christina LaRose, who had experience working on editing faculty book projects and who wanted to learn more about academic publishing. After Christina completed a few tests runs, we determined that web research (though labor intensive) would tell us quite a bit about the publishing activity happening on campus.

In the course of about a month, Christina examined the websites of 243 different units on our Ann Arbor campus, 86 units on the UM-Dearborn campus, and 71 units on the UM-Flint campus. These campus units included schools and colleges, departments, centers, institutes, museums, independent laboratories, campus initiatives, and the like. We found many different publication types, including newsletters or magazines, journals, books and book series, lectures, conference proceedings, teaching materials, technical reports, white papers, and other gray literature. In short, we found a lot of stuff—hundreds of publications all across the three campuses of our university. It can be hard to determine how many distinct publications we're talking about—does a book series count as one publication or many and how do you know if what you're looking at is in fact a series?—but we can say that there is a diverse and robust amount of publishing activity happening at the University of Michigan.

As she scoured the websites of all these campus units, we also had Christina look for indications of whether these publishing efforts were actively acquiring new titles, if they were offering content for purchase or for free, what kind of formats were available, and contact info in case we wanted to learn more. We found several examples of possible publishing partners who might benefit from our services. For example...

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...an academic department handling fulfillment for a nearly a hundred titles! While we probably can't do much for how they handle their backlist, perhaps they would be interested in learning about print-on-demand or our publishing services imprint. And perhaps they would like to deposit their older, backlist items in our institutional repository.

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...and here we have an annual literary journal which might benefit from a conversation with our journals team about how to increase their readership through a more robust online presence, including a digital version of their publication.

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...and finally, a campus research unit who publishes policy papers online using a third-party platform that is inaccessible to screen readers. Wow, I'd love to see this content in our institutional repository.

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So what are we doing with this information we've gathered?

We've approached a few of the campus units whose projects look like good fits for our services, who could be "quick wins" to help us demonstrate to ourselves and to others that we can take on more of this work. We're currently in negotiation with or have already taken on responsibility for a book series and a journal that we discovered thanks to Christina's work. And over time, we hope to approach more of the campus units on our list.

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If we were going to do this again, or I were going to recommend a project like this to a colleague, I might offer some advice about how to proceed.

We went looking for pretty much everything. Our definition of what could be considered a scholarly publication was very broad—nearly any format or subject matter. As a result, we probably found a lot of things we're never going to touch. Is that time wasted? Not necessarily, but a narrower, more focused investigation would have taken less time and effort.

In our particular context, we were limited by political and logistical challenges. But perhaps those great ideas we had about looking at financial transactions, accounting ledgers, or other data might work on your campus. Maybe you could learn quite a bit by pulling reports from your campus information systems. Don't start with brute force. We ended up there, but you might not need to go that route.