



UC BERKELEY * FACULTY CONFERENCE ON SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING

The Monograph

Scholarly monographs have long been viewed as the “gold standard” for scholarship in the humanities and social sciences. Over the last several years, however, we are hearing significant worries about the long-term viability of the monograph from scholars, publishers, and libraries alike.

- Young scholars feel they must have one, or maybe even two monographs in their portfolio to qualify for tenure.
- University presses report ever-increasing difficulty in finding markets for the scholarly monograph, at the same time that sources of revenue other than sales (e.g., subsidies from campuses, endowments and grants) have shrunk or disappeared altogether.
- Library budgets have not kept pace with inflation; libraries are struggling to purchase both electronic and print resources in all fields while the volume of monographic material keeps rising.

In a nutshell,

“Tenure committees usually judge the merits of young scholars by how deeply and knowledgeably they expand on previous research, but they must publish their work in presses that are increasingly making decisions on the basis of breadth and crossover appeal rather than scholarly depth.”¹

Demand for outlet is up

- “Schools that once considered a group of articles acceptable evidence for tenure now routinely demand a published book; other schools have begun to make the transition from requiring one book to requiring two.”²
- “The publication record of faculty achieving tenure has increased since the 1970s, suggesting that requirements for promotion and tenures in CIC schools have increased...Of faculty tenured since 2000, ...89% had one or more completed manuscripts at the time they were considered for tenure. Of the faculty tenured prior to 1980, fewer than two-thirds report having a completed manuscript at the time they were considered for tenure.”³
- “From 1986 to 2002...the world-wide production of books increased approximately 50 percent”⁴
- “Based on preliminary figures, Bowker is projecting that U.S. title output in 2003 increased a staggering 19% to 175,000 new titles and editions, the highest total ever recorded.”⁵

Who’s selling? Who’s buying? Prices and Budgets.

Inflation occurs with monographs as it does with journals, and as with journals, non-profit publishers tend to set better prices than for-profit publishers.

Percentage increases 1986-2000 for ARL Libraries	
consumer price index	68%
monograph unit cost	82%
monograph expenditures	66%
monographs purchased	0%

Percentage increases 1989-2000	
consumer price index	39%
average suggested retail price of a scholarly book, university presses	14%
average suggested retail price of a scholarly book, commercial scholarly presses	23%

¹ The Future of Scholarly Publishing, MLA Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of Scholarly Publishing. http://www.mla.org/resources/documents/issues_scholarly_pub/repview_future_pub

² Ibid.

³ *The Book as the Gold Standard for Tenure and Promotion in the Humanistic Disciplines: Findings and Analysis*. Leigh Estabrook. <http://lrc.lis.uiuc.edu/reports/CICBook.html>

⁴ *The Facts: The Economics of Publishing*. The Office of Scholarly Communication, University of California. http://osc.universityofcalifornia.edu/facts/econ_of_publishing.html

⁵ *U.S. Book Production Soars to 175,000 New Titles in 2003; Trade Up, University Presses Down*. Bowker News Release. May 2004. http://www.bowker.com/press/bowker/2004_0527_bowker.htm



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Who's selling? Who's buying? Prices and Budgets (continued)

University Presses

Although a subset of monographs purchased by Libraries come from university presses, their missions and that of the academy are closely linked. The view from the university press underlines the challenges faced by all who wish to publish a monograph:

- “1 book in every 10 new books published in the United States is published by a university press.”⁶
- “The American Association of University Presses reports that overall sales in the industry decreased by 1.5% in 2003, on top of a .3% reduction in 2002 and a 2.6% drop in 2001.”⁷
- “While print-runs of 1,000 to 1,500 copies were standard ten years ago [1987], [university] presses are now confronting sales of 400-500 copies.”⁸
- “...about 75% of the domestic sales revenue for university press books is coming from individuals buying through a bookstore, online retailer, or direct from the publishers, and about 25% from institutional purchasers, most of them libraries.”
- “...whereas we could once count on selling about 800 copies to libraries worldwide, we are now lucky if we can sell 200. And scholars are no longer buying as many books for their personal libraries, either... If print runs get much smaller, the question arises, Why publish at all? And if prices go much higher, scholars... may simply refuse to buy...”⁹

Are monographs our best choice?

Advances in pre-print and post-print technologies, together with the rising interest by scholars in access to materials online, offer new opportunities and raise questions the academy has begun to address:

- “We asked faculty members to rank some of the advantages of and incentives to use of electronic publishing. Most frequently cited were: (1) wider dissemination; (2) lower publishing delay; and (3) allows multimedia and hyperlinked components.”¹⁰
- “The survey of faculty also asked ‘As you think about the nature of your current research and the best ways to publish it, is a book length manuscript the best way in which to present your work?’ Fewer than half ...stated ‘Yes a book length manuscript is needed to develop fully the logic of my argument and ideas.’ An additional 35.4 percent stated they would ‘prefer to publish as a book; but it would be possible to break down the work into a series of articles.’”¹¹
- “I predict that the genre of scholarship that will replace the book will be the thematic research collection... I think they may be more viable, because they have something that most scholarly books do not, namely an audience. It's hard to sell five hundred copies of most humanities monographs; few sell in the thousands. And yet, these Web-based projects, on relatively esoteric subjects, receive thousands of visitors each day, serve up gigabytes of their content to avid users each week, and reach readers of all ages, inside and outside academia, and around the world.”¹²

⁶ *Some University Press Facts*. <http://www.aaupnet.org/aboutup/upfacts.html>

⁷ *The University Press Publishers: Sidestepping Fate*. Niko Pfund. from *We're Not Dead Yet!*, November 15, 2004. Library Journal. <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA479162.html>

⁸ *University Presses: Balancing Academic and Market Values*. Mary Case. ARL: A Bimonthly Newsletter of Research Library Issues and Actions. <http://www.arl.org/newsltr/193/up.html>

⁹ *Researching Specialized Audiences: The Publisher's Conundrum*. Joanna Hitchcock, Director, University of Texas Press.

¹⁰ *The Book as the Gold Standard for Tenure and Promotion in the Humanistic Disciplines: Findings and Analysis*. Leigh Estabrook. <http://lrc.lis.uiuc.edu/reports/CICBook.html>

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *The Crisis in Scholarly Publishing in the Humanities*. John M. Unsworth. ARL Bimonthly Report 228, June 2003. <http://www.arl.org/newsltr/228/crisis.html>