

***UT Scholarly Communications Committee
Meeting Notes, November 1, 2004***

Present: George Kabalka, Miriam Levering, Bruce Ralston, Soren Sorensen, Jay Whelan, Kurt Piehler, Sara Williams, Ron Gilmour, Molly Royse, Jane Row, Marie Garrett, Allen Dunn, David Baker, Linda Phillips (convener)

Soren described a periodicals cost-effectiveness study on which he and librarians collaborated during the summer. From data on 15 high energy physics journals, titles published by American Physical Society and other scholarly associations cost less than those published by commercial firms, but received higher impact, according to ISI's Journal Citation Reports. Library staff are collecting data on more titles in the physics list to see if the trend holds for a larger sample.

When the Committee was formed in Spring 2004, we considered ways to change the scholarly publishing culture. One idea is for universities to take a more active role in publishing peer-reviewed scholarship locally. Today's meeting addressed the question, "What considerations should be given to developing an online publishing program at UT?" The group looked at web sites from other universities with online publishing initiatives, including University of Wisconsin Parallel Press, the University of Arizona Journal of Insect Science, Emory University's journal, Molecular Vision, Virginia Tech's Digital Library & Archives, and the California Digital Library eScholarship program.

Comments, questions, and suggestions included the following:

1. What cost models are in place, and what are the costs to launch and support online publishing? Many journals seek at least two outside readers and some pay readers (\$150 is the going rate with one publisher). Staff costs account for the greatest portion of expenditures in the scholarly publishing process. Considerable time is required to solicit manuscripts, review content, make editorial improvements to items selected for publication, and promote access to the content.
2. The Libraries and UT Press are likely collaborators, combining Press publishing experience and library digitization/information access expertise. Would the Press experiment with the publication of a journal?
3. With regard to scope of an online publishing program, medieval studies is a potential subject opportunity. UT's growing reputation in this area, interest in multidisciplinary approaches to scholarship, recent funding of MARCO initiatives, the typically small audience for scholarly publications in the field, and the high cost of monographs suggest exploration of medieval studies as a possible choice of specialization. What other niches might be strategic for UT? Digital publication in narrowly specialized areas could provide international attention to UT programs. Is there a niche in the sciences?

4. Several academic cultural practices confer status on a publication. Authors and tenure/promotion committees favor articles and books that are published in sources considered top quality. Quality of a source is determined by reputation of the editor and editorial board, physical/visual attributes of the publication, number of places indexed, and frequency of citations, as well as by the reputation of its authors. The Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) [publications cover humanities and social sciences as well as science and technology] impact factor assigns a ranking based on several empirical criteria. Number of sales can be a qualitative factor. Where a book is reviewed and frequency of reviews improve sales whether the reviews are favorable or not. A reputation for quality evolves over time. Rejection rates for top quality journals range from 40%-85%. According to presentations at the September 2004 The Book & The Scholar Symposium at UT, it is common for each of the 90+ American university presses to reject 1,000 manuscripts per year. Many manuscripts are rejected because they are out of scope. Press budgets at UT and UK enable the publication of 40-60 titles each year.

5. Materials now freely available on the Web could be candidates for an online imprint. The branding that comes from subjecting content to a formal review process conveys quality, and adds value through editorial attention and increased exposure. Exposure comes from marketing by the online publisher, and from the addition of metadata that connects online publications to an emerging network of digital standards and mechanisms that link citations and full text.

6. An economic model that subsidizes expenses for creating a monograph could enable the online publication of narrowly specialized titles that normally would have too small a projected readership to be accepted for print publication. Untenured faculty who seek to develop their dissertations into monographs would benefit from such a model. Can universities create a new publishing model where funds now spent on triple-digit cost inflation are diverted to supporting internal publication costs?

7. What should be the purpose of a university-sponsored digital publication program? During this discussion Committee members spoke from the contexts of: a) expansion of publication venues for highly specialized materials that are unlikely to recover publication costs from sales; b) desire to provide open access to scholarly information, recognizing that the universities already subsidize the cost; and c) potential for creating competition to expensive journals.

The UT Library is willing to experiment with online publication for the campus by exploring the creation of a library imprint. This discussion suggested several possible next steps. These include articulation of a purpose or mission statement, development of a preliminary cost model, identification of strategic niches in which to publish, and collaboration with scholars who wish to be involved as authors, editors, reviewers, and advisors.