



Association for Political  
and Legal Anthropology

The section of the American Anthropological Association  
committed to critical study of politics and law

---

President  
Erik Harms  
[erik.harms@vale.edu](mailto:erik.harms@vale.edu)

Secretary  
Anu Sharma  
[asharma@weslevan.edu](mailto:asharma@weslevan.edu)

President-Elect  
Erica Bornstein  
[elbornst@uwm.edu](mailto:elbornst@uwm.edu)

Dr. Persis Drell  
Office of the Provost  
Building 10  
Stanford University  
Stanford, CA 94305

Sunday, 5 May, 2019

Dear Provost Drell,

I am writing in my capacity as the elected president of the Association for Political and Legal Anthropology (APLA), its elected Board, and its 596 dues-paying members to encourage you to continue providing institutional support to Stanford University Press. We enthusiastically support your recent decision to continue funding the press after initial reports indicated that you planned to withdraw university support. However, we also worry that you have only committed to do so for one year. As professional anthropologists, many of whom publish our works with SUP, we join a chorus of scholars who feel compelled to reiterate that sustained support of the press is central to the university's academic mission. Along with the strength of Stanford's faculty and students, the academic publishing program provided by Stanford University Press is one of the primary indicators of the intellectual vitality and impact of the university. Without a vibrant university press, I can assure you that Stanford's academic reputation will suffer irreparable harm within the global community of scholars.

APLA as an organization is aware of the costs and challenges of maintaining a commitment to academic publishing. Although we operate with a much smaller budget than Stanford University, we too engage in scholarly publishing through our flagship journal, the *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*. This journal, like many university presses, operates on a tight budget and requires financial support from our organization, most of which comes from the dues of association members. Not only that, the journal is supported by the unpaid labor of its editorial leadership team, countless peer-reviewers, and of course the authors who do this work as part of a commitment to academic scholarship, which is the heart of academic life. While we recognize the challenges of such a financial model, we continue to do this because academic publishing is central to scholarly exchange. That's it. It's quite simple. Without academic publishing, you neither have academic exchange of ideas nor intellectual community. Without academic exchange of ideas, you don't have universities. This is why we publish: for scholarship, for ideas, and for the constant intellectual exchange that makes scientific and humanistic thought possible. If we based our publishing decisions

on profitability alone, we would be engaging in a different pursuit. Academic publishers are not only vetting systems for the lives of academics and their work, they are structures of intellectual engagement. To dismantle SUP would be to make vulnerable the very core of a viable forum for academic life. Not only do academic publishers support work that is unprofitable in monetary terms, they support ideas that challenge the status quo, and that are risky. This is a vital role of academic publishing that SUP has done so well to support. In fact, SUP has been on the forefront of publishing in such areas as Human Rights and Middle East Studies, as well as East Asian Studies, with anthropologists at all phases of their career eager to publish in these highly respected series. These two arenas, as well as the Anthropology series, are critical to the Association for Political and Legal Anthropology and its membership.

Just a few days ago, before learning of your initial plan to withdraw funding, I was discussing publication plans with two of the Yale anthropology program's most recent PhD graduates. This is a conversation that essentially all academic advisors in anthropology have with their PhD students when they graduate, because this is what most PhD students in anthropology go on to do: they publish academic books. As we discussed potential presses, both the students and I considered Stanford University Press as a "dream press" for their future publications. Like Stanford University itself, SUP is a guiding institution that aspiring scholars truly respect and yearn to work with. I say this, because I think you should know how much scholars across the world respect your university press, and I urge you to show the same respect to the press that we do. I, for one, have only set foot on the Stanford campus once in my life. But I read SUP press books with extraordinary regularity. With every volume I read, I am able to hold in my hands the accumulated history and honorable reputation of your institution, and it reaches me in ways very few other things do. I will spend days reading, pouring over, discussing, and engaging the ideas contained within one of those volumes. And then I put it on my shelf, return to it, reference it, remember it. SUP volumes are not only published, they are widely cited, and with every interaction with an SUP book, Stanford's prestige grows just a little bit more. I hope you can learn to recognize this, and will continue the University's commitment to support its remarkable press for many years to come.

Sincerely,



Erik Harms  
President, Association for Political and Legal  
Anthropology  
Associate Professor of Anthropology  
Yale University