

# Report from the Provostial Committee on the Future of the Stanford University Press

October 15, 2019

## 1 Preamble

Outstanding universities and their presses share the same goals: the creation of transformative research, the education and development of the next generation of scholars, and the synthesis of knowledge that makes academic research understandable across disciplines and among a broader public. Universities operate as nonprofits because the research and education they produce are public goods and generate positive spillovers for society. Similarly, their presses produce ideas and insights not fully supported by the marketplace but highly valued in society. The peer review system for monographs, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, accentuates the role that great university presses play in encouraging and sustaining high academic standards.

The best university presses share elements of institutional design and operation. A long-term intellectual vision animates the press. The director of the press operates from a strategic plan formulated through discussion with faculty, editors, administrators, and advisors from the publishing industry. The plan guides decisions about which fields to develop, which series to launch, and which formats to pursue, often with an eye toward clusters of excellence and new initiatives on campus. Conversations at the university about press strategy and performance are frequent and engaging. These include monthly financial check-ins with a senior financial administrator, monthly editorial discussions with another high-level university official, frequent meetings of the faculty editorial board responsible for

manuscript approvals, and semi-annual gatherings about vision and implementation with faculty representing a range of departments, other university leaders, and outside advisors. Universities' support for the success of their presses takes numerous forms: strong engagement by the faculty, significant involvement from university leadership, sustained funding, and encouragement for fundraising. When vision, engagement, and resources align, a remarkable university press reflects the excellence of the university and contributes to its mission.

While the relationship between Stanford and its Press has some elements of the most successful presses, both the University and the Press have failed systematically to aspire to, and reach, this standard. A better relationship would entail the University administration committing to longer-term support for the Press, and helping to devise institutional structures that would lead to wider engagement by faculty, administrators, and publishing experts with it. A better relationship would also mean that a broad range of faculty members would serve on the editorial board and/or participate in advisory roles; and that faculty would engage the Press about discussions of vision and strategy, submit distinguished manuscripts, and participate in publishing experiments. To reach this goal, for its part, the Press would need to cultivate and respond to changes in the academy and among the Stanford faculty. The Press would need to engage with more Stanford faculty in a larger number of disciplines, take advantage of the infusion of ideas and resources around new University initiatives, develop a long-term strategy and pursue its implementation through regular discussions with advisors at Stanford and beyond, and continue exploring new formats in publishing.

Throughout our discussions this summer, we have been struck by the eagerness among all stakeholders to see Stanford University Press thrive. Yet, reaching the goal of a press that is equal to the status of Stanford University has been difficult. Below, we attempt a better understanding of the source of the problems and offer a set of specific recommendations for consideration.

## 2 Review Procedures

In the spring of 2019, the Provost asked a group of faculty to undertake an examination of Stanford University Press and to report back with recommendations on governance and finance. The original committee had six members: Ronald Egan (East Asian Languages and Cultures), Roland Greene (Comparative Literature and English), James T. Hamilton (Communication), Paul Harrison (Religious Studies), and Bernadette Meyler (School of Law) with Judith Goldstein (Political Science) as chair. In the first weeks, Aron Rodrigue (History) and Dana Shelley (University Budget Office) were added to the group. The Provost asked the group to gain “insights from those on campus who work with the Press, including the editorial board, authors and staff.” In addition, the Provost asked that the Committee look outside the university, both to those who work in university presses and to scholars whose opinions they value. To better assess the Press, the Provost recommended that an external visiting committee be formed and that the committee seek guidance from these external reviewers to include, among other things, “the optimal size of the Press, its financial needs, its fundraising potential, its organizational structure and its governance and reporting relationships within the University.”

In response to this charge, the committee organized itself around three tasks. First, the committee met with interested parties on campus over the summer of 2019. Second, the group charged a visiting committee of three to provide an external analysis of the Press. Third, the group reached out to directors of major presses and hired a research analyst to search the internet and provide data in order to better understand how the Press compared with others in terms of a set of established criteria.

**Meeting with interested parties:** Over the summer the group met with representatives from around campus. The list included current and former members of the editorial board; departmental and University leaders; a representative from the university presses’ national association; Michael Keller, Vice-Provost for Teaching and Learning and University Librarian; Alan Harvey, the Director and Editor-in-Chief of Stanford University Press; and representatives of the Faculty Senate and the “Save SUP” group.

**External Review:** At the Provost's behest, the committee invited a three-person committee to campus to help respond to its queries. That committee was composed of Peter Dougherty, the former director of Princeton University Press, who currently serves as an editor at large there; Kathleen Keene, the former director of the Johns Hopkins University Press; and Roby Harrington, Vice Chair of W.W. Norton and Company. The visiting committee arrived on September 1 and presented a verbal report to the Provost on September 5. This report reflects the insights provided by that group. To organize their task, we asked the external review committee to consider the following questions in assessing the Press.

- a. Does the current governance structure serve the interests of the Press and the expectations of the University?
- b. Does the Press need a governing or advisory council?
- c. How would you assess the role played by the Press's editorial committee?
- d. What should be the Press's governance and reporting structure?
- e. Does the Press's administrative structure operate in a strategic manner?
- f. How would you rate its editorial efficiency?
- g. How would you evaluate the editorial plans of the Press?
- h. What is your evaluation of the publication history and reputation of the Press? Given its relative size, how do the Press's lists compare to others in breadth, depth and quality?
- i. Given contemporary pressures on academic publishing, does the scale and scope of the Press seem appropriate?
- j. How would you evaluate the size of the gap between revenues and costs? What options would you recommend for filling that gap in a way that supports the overall excellence of the Press? Are there sources of revenue that it could and should explore?
- k. Is the reputation of the Press commensurate with that of the University as a whole? If not, why not?

**Collecting Data:** The committee collected its own data from a number of sources. First, members of the committee spoke with the directors of major academic presses about governance structures and finances. Second, the Press provided data for the committee on its publishing history and finances. Third, we received data that had been collected from the national organization of university presses. Fourth, a research assistant searched the web pages of a number of other academic presses to obtain a richer picture of the Press's operations.

### 3 Meet the Press

Stanford University Press dates to 1891 when David Starr Jordan, the University's first president, accepted the position only after Jane Stanford agreed that the University would provide an outlet for the publication of the research of its students and faculty of the University. While the Press itself dates its existence to this historic moment, the evolution of the operation into its present form is more modern. The first general editor was hired in 1925, and by 1939, the Press had 70 employees. The range of books published in the early years was broad, and in many ways, fulfilled the original mandate of staying close to the academic work of the faculty. Even today, the Press has a higher proportion of local faculty among its authors than do the other major presses<sup>1</sup>

The Press has had only six directors in its history, the first to have that title being Donald Bean, who was hired from the University of Chicago Press in 1945. The Press's strongest period of growth was under the stewardship of Leon Seltzer, who became Director in 1956. Gradually more specialized after his tenure, the Press became known for its emphasis on the humanities, Asian studies and literary studies. In 2000 the reporting relationship of the Press moved from the Provost to the University Librarian, and Geoffrey Burn was hired as Director. During his tenure, the Press continued its strength in the humanities although it never stopped publishing in a range of other scholarly arenas, and established new lists in busi-

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<sup>1</sup>In 2018, Stanford authors were 10 percent of all authors. Most other presses are in the 5-6 percent range.

ness, economics, and law. After ten years as Editor-in-Chief, Alan Harvey became Director in 2012. Originally located on the central campus, the Press moved to Palo Alto in 2002 and is now located at the Redwood City campus.

Today the Press has a staff of 34, with 11 (including Alan Harvey who is still in charge of one of the lists) on the acquisitions side and the others on the administrative, production, and marketing side of the business. With an annual budget of just under 8 million dollars, the Press is smaller than many of its counterparts; according to size it ranks in the second tier of university presses as determined by the Association of University Presses. For comparison, Princeton University Press has an annual budget of almost 40 million dollars. On the other hand, the budget of Stanford University Press is larger than that of many presses such as the University of Pennsylvania Press, which has a 4 million dollar annual budget. By budget size among the major university presses, SUP is closest in size to Cornell.

We collected from the web pages of other academic presses some general publishing data that helps identify aspects of the Stanford University Press's profile and how it compares to other university presses.

- The number of books published by Stanford has ranged from about 170 in 2009 to about 120 in 2018. While the very large presses, Chicago and Princeton, publish close to 300 books a year, these numbers at Stanford are on par with Hopkins, Penn, and Cornell.

- The majority of books at Stanford, as with other presses, do not come out as part of a series. However, looking at the series titles is an interesting way to compare the emphases of these presses. If we look over the past 10 years, the top five series, in terms of numbers of books, at Stanford University Press have been: Cultural Memory in the Present, Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture, Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics, Stanford Studies in the Middle East, and Stanford Studies in Human Rights. Other presses specialize in different areas of scholarship that sometimes, but not always, reflect the academic strengths of their home university. At Chicago, their top set of books derive from their association with the National Bureau of Economic Research, followed by their series on poetry. MIT has strong lists on urban and industrial environment and technol-

ogy. The University of Pennsylvania Press's strengths are in human rights and the Middle Ages. Cornell's top series is on security and political economy. Hopkins' top series is on health.

- Another way to characterize presses is by the departments to which their authors belong. At Stanford University Press, the list is dominated by historians, followed by authors who describe their field as literary studies. We see History dominating in many other places as well, including at Cornell, Princeton, Penn, Hopkins, and Chicago. The only two that did not list History as their top departments for authors were NYU, with a majority of authors there in the social sciences, and MIT, which publishes many authors in the arts and economics.

- We found that presses varied in the academic ranks of their authors. Stanford has more assistant professors among its authors than most other presses: 33 percent. Thus comparatively, they have fewer full professors: 40 percent. At MIT, 57 percent of the books were by senior faculty and only 13 percent from assistant professors; similarly, Princeton had 66 percent full professors and only 12 percent assistant professors; Penn, 53 percent full professors and the smallest number of assistant professors of the major presses, 7 percent; NYU's proportion was closer to Stanford, 37 percent full professors and 29 percent assistant professors; Cornell, 45 percent full professors and 23 percent assistant professors; Hopkins, 47 percent full professors and 16 percent assistant professors; Chicago, 52 percent full professors and 20 percent assistant professors. In this report's section on strategy, one suggestion we make is for the Press to consider a better balance among its authors. First books rarely make money, although they may establish relationships that will pay off later. Developing a more balanced list of authors could increase the Press's financial stability as well as its stature.

- One other distinguishing feature of a press is the institutional affiliation of its authors. To gauge this, we looked at where authors held appointments. This is an imperfect measure but gives us some insight into the strength of the Press's appeal to prospective authors. Looking at the data, it appears that on the metric of the number of authors over the last ten years who were from the top 10 or 20 universities, Stanford does not do as well as do Princeton and Chicago

but is on par with most other academic presses. At Stanford, 11 percent of authors in the last 10 years were affiliated with a top 10 university and another 10 percent were at schools ranked between 11 and 20. MIT was not much different. At MIT, 14 percent of authors were in top 10 universities and another 11 percent were in institutions ranked 11–20; similarly, Cornell had 9 percent from the top 10 and another 13 percent from universities in the 11–20 position; University of Pennsylvania Press had 11 percent at top 10 and 9 percent at the 11–20 position; Hopkins authors were 10 percent at the top 10 and 7 percent at the next rank. At the lower end, NYU had only 3.5 percent in top 10 schools and another 8 percent in the next rank. Princeton and Chicago did much better at recruiting authors from top universities: at Princeton 31 percent of the authors were affiliated with a top 10 university and another 16 percent were from universities ranked 11–20 and at Chicago, 19 percent of the authors came from the top 10 institutions and another 13 percent from those ranked 11–20.<sup>2</sup>

## **4 Recommendations on Governance and Relationship with the University**

From our discussions with many stakeholders across campus, we have concluded that the current governance structure of the Press is inadequate. The reporting relationship to the University Librarian has not succeeded in tying the Press sufficiently to the core of the university administration, which has come to regard the fate of the Press as a problem to be managed rather than a bellwether of general excellence for Stanford University. Accordingly, the Press has suffered from some level of benign neglect over the past decades.

In 2018, the Association of University Presses undertook a survey of its members on governance structures. The report found that 44 percent of university presses report to the chief academic officer of their university and 34 percent to the library. In order to glean further insights into what are considered best practices on the part

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<sup>2</sup>We included Stanford authors in this metric. SUP publishes a larger percentage of Stanford authors, or home school authors than does other presses. This is slightly inflating the Stanford numbers



of university presses, and particularly into how peer institutions relate to their presses as well as how top presses are organized, we engaged in supplemental research. After describing the results of our research, we present our recommendations about governance.

**Governance of Other University Presses:** As part of our committee’s background research, we identified thirteen presses to investigate, based on their affiliation with a peer institution, their status within academic publishing, or their comparability in terms of size and publication areas to Stanford University Press. These include the presses at: the University of California, the University of Chicago, Columbia University, Cornell University, Duke University, Harvard University, Johns Hopkins University, the University of Michigan, MIT, New York University, Princeton University, the University of Washington, and Yale University. Members of our committee then phoned the directors of each of these presses and spoke with them at length. The principal findings from our conversations pertaining to press governance are recorded here. The takeaway is that the most successful presses have a close relationship with their universities, often including multiple points of interaction, whether through meeting regularly with both academic and financial officers or through working with several boards. Presses engaged in fundraising for an endowment have particularly benefited from having an advisory board.

The majority of presses we surveyed report directly to the provost of their universities or to an associate or vice provost. At the University of Chicago, Columbia, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, and the University of California, the press reports directly to the Provost. Within some of those institutions, the precise details of the reporting relationship may shift depending on who is currently serving as Provost, although monthly meetings seem to be the norm. At Duke, in anticipation of a 2018 external review, the reporting structure recently altered; the Director of the Press now reports to the Provost through the Vice Provost for Interdisciplinary Studies. Beginning in 2003, the Director of Yale University Press, who used to report to the President of Yale, now reports to a deputy provost who is in charge of all scholarly communication on campus, including the press, the libraries, the museum, and the art gallery.

Alternatively, some presses, like Stanford, report to the head of the university library. At the University of Washington, the Press Director traditionally reported to the Dean of the Graduate School; the reporting relationship shifted to the Dean of Libraries last year, partly because that dean is also the Vice Provost for Digital Initiatives. Cornell University Press recently moved to reporting to the library as well. The Press reports to the Provost through the library but also consults with the Vice President for Budget and Finance. Indeed most of the presses that report to the library also have some mechanism for receiving periodic feedback and attention from other university leaders. For example, while the director of NYU Press reports to the head of the library, she has meetings every semester with the Provost and a meeting every month with a vice provost involved with budgeting, who also sits on the advisory board of the press.

With respect to those presses reporting to the director of the library, there are varying degrees of integration into the library. Although the Director of the MIT Press reports to the Director of the Libraries, the Press maintains a budget separate from the Libraries. By contrast, at Michigan, the budget for the press is a line item in the library's budget, which is reviewed and approved by the Provost. The press at Michigan may be the most thoroughly integrated into the library system. The director of the press also serves as Associate University Librarian for Publishing. This means he runs the press, has responsibility for an institutional repository called Deep Blue, and runs Michigan Publishing Services. The latter publishes work by University of Michigan faculty that would otherwise be hard to publish, including conference proceedings and white papers. The Publishing Services projects extend beyond the humanities and social sciences and include works by engineering and medical faculty.

On the other end of the spectrum, Princeton University Press maintains significant independence from the university as a separate 501(c)(3) corporation. The director of Princeton University Press reports to the press's Board of Trustees. The press possesses a substantial endowment, to which the trustees and director have access, although the endowment is held by Princeton University as a whole. Yale University Press also remains fairly autonomous financially, despite its being a department of Yale University.

It is worth dwelling on several points already indicated by the account of reporting arrangements above. While a number of presses enjoy only one official reporting relationship, they often consult with finance and budget officers regularly, if they are reporting to an academic officer. Some institutions formalize this division more clearly than others. For example, at Harvard, there is a deliberate effort to keep the financial and editorial aspects of the press’s operations separate. Hence the director of the press is selected by and reports directly to Harvard’s Provost. All staff at the press, in the US and UK offices, report directly or indirectly to the director of the press. The Board of Syndics ensures that the editorial process for vetting manuscripts (peer review) is properly followed, and the Board of Directors have oversight over the press’s business and finances. Likewise, although the press director at MIT consults with the Director of Libraries about editorial and strategic matters, she and her CFO consult with the Vice President for Finance—who oversees accounting units that are related to “profits,” such as dining services—with respect to financial issues. Similarly, the University of Chicago Press has budget targets that come from the Provost and the University Budget Director and the director meets with them several times a year to discuss progress and plan for upcoming years. At Columbia, the university also engages in regular financial oversight of the press, including monthly budget meetings between the Director of the Press and the Executive Vice-Provost at which financial matters are discussed. The Press delivers quarterly financial reports to the Provost’s office and treasury, and there is an annual budget meeting for the Press. At Johns Hopkins, the press’s Chief Financial Officer reports on finances to the university on a monthly basis, with increased activity around the budgeting process.

In addition, a number of the presses that we contacted had recently changed their reporting relationships or their organizational structure. We sought feedback on the effects of these changes. The overall trend we observed was toward greater integration of university presses into the administrative structure of their universities. For example, Columbia University Press was a for-profit unit incorporated separately from Columbia from its founding in 1893 until 2016, when it was integrated into the university. The Director of Columbia University Press and Associate Provost who oversaw this process indicated that the results have been beneficial in terms of

cash flow, health insurance for personnel, legal matters, and most important, for tapping the intellectual energy at Columbia.

Our recommendations for Stanford's Press on its governance and its relationship with the University are based on our survey of best practices at other university presses and discussions with press directors, our extensive conversations with the committee charged with an external review of Stanford University Press, and the normative view expressed by many members of our university community that the Press should be allowed to benefit from a closer connection with the University. Because these changes will take time to implement fully, we also recommend several interim measures during the next five years.

**Report to the Provost:** Historically, until about twenty years ago, Stanford University Press reported to the Provost. We recommend a return to that reporting relationship, thus:

**Recommendation 1. The Press should report directly to the Provost.**

The Press needs a more intimate connection to the academic mission of the university and reporting through the Provost cements the ties between the Press and the central university administration. Elevating the Press's priority and status within the university will help to ensure a renewed commitment to the Press. This reporting structure is also consistent with that of many of our peer institutions, particularly those with exceptionally strong presses.

**Require Additional Financial Reporting:** In the transitional period, for at least 5 years, it is important that the Press receive the support of a finance officer in the central administration. The directors of many peer presses meet quite frequently with such an officer and receive input on budgeting and fundraising. Thus:

**Recommendation 2. The Press should report additionally to one of two budget officers, either to the Vice President for Business Affairs and Chief Financial Officer or to the Vice Provost for Budget and Auxiliaries Manage-**

**ment. This dual reporting relationship should exist for at least five years, after which the need for the dual reporting should be re-evaluated.**

**The Use of Formal Advisory Bodies:** Several of the presses we contacted depend on an advisory or governing board in addition to the editorial board. All of the directors of these presses praised the value of these structures, noting, among other advantages, that such boards can furnish valuable input into the editorial vision of the press and the directions that it should pursue, as well as guidance and support in fundraising. Another advantage of this dual setup is that it may help to separate financial and editorial deliberations, or at least prevent one from automatically impinging upon the other.

Yale University Press claims the greatest variety of governing and advisory boards. At Yale, the press is governed by three committees, a board of governors, a faculty advisory board, and a publications committee (i.e., an editorial board). The board of governors, selected by the President of Yale, maintains fiduciary and operational oversight. Comprised of seventeen members, this board has recently been reconstituted to include a better balance of press representation, administrators, and faculty. The faculty advisory committee is appointed by the director of the press alone. Their job is to advise the director on areas of new scholarly interest and on disciplinary growth and transformation. The editorial board is discussed below.

Princeton University Press is governed by its Board of Trustees, composed of 15 members: five members drawn from the editorial board, who are members of the Princeton faculty, five from either the administration or the faculty, and five outside trustees mainly drawn from commercial publishing. These five are elected with the chair of the Board of Trustees elected from among these outside members. Each serves for five years, with one member from each of the three groups altering each year. The Board of Trustees is separate from the editorial board. The Princeton Press has the status of an independent legal entity.

At Harvard, the Board of Syndics serves the function of an editorial board. Harvard also possesses a Board of Directors, which currently consists of eleven members, including both senior Harvard

faculty and executives from commercial publishing. MIT similarly has a Press Management Board, which constitutes an advisory board chaired by the Director of Libraries. This board meets twice a year, provides advice on operations and strategy, and receives reports from the press. Members include the MIT Press Director, faculty, representatives of the office of the Provost and office of the President, the Executive Vice President and Treasurer, and outsiders involved in publishing. The members are appointed by the President, with the new members determined in fact by the MIT Press Director in consultation with the Director of Libraries. The University of California Press also has a Board of Directors, which is composed of industry experts, faculty, and librarians. It meets three times a year, and the Provost attends these meetings. It is tasked with overseeing financial operations and both approves the budget and a strategic investment fund.

Some boards aid their presses in raising money. Columbia University Press has an Advisory Council, which assists in fundraising. This Council includes faculty, other publishers, and prominent New Yorkers such as the past head of the New York Public Library. Likewise, the primary responsibility of the Advisory Board of the University of Washington Press is fundraising. The Board consists of Seattle community members who have been active in supporting the Press. There is, in addition, an Honorary Advisory Board that includes more senior former Advisory Board members.

From our discussions, it seems that more presses have recently added or are planning to add an additional advisory board. With a new director in place, Duke University Press plans to create an advisory board focusing on strategic and operational issues; this body will be comprised of administrators, faculty, and external publishing professionals.

**Establish an Advisory Board:** Peer presses have benefited greatly from establishing a board that can help to develop and assess the press's strategic vision both for its editorial and business strategies. These boards generally combine publishing professionals with university administrators and faculty members and can sometimes also assist presses with fundraising. At many of the universities surveyed,

the members are appointed by the university's Provost or President. However, given the important function of Stanford's Faculty Senate for ensuring faculty governance, we believe that the Senate should have a role in the appointment process. Thus:

**Recommendation 3. The Provost should create a Stanford University Press Advisory Board and appoint twelve members with the following structure:**

- Four members should be university administrators (including the Provost, the Vice President for Business Affairs, the Director of the Library, and a University Development officer);
- Four should be outside publishing experts;
- Four should be faculty members drawn from names furnished by the Committee on Committees of the Faculty Senate with the goal of representing the breadth of academic knowledge at the University without duplicating the membership of the editorial board.
- Faculty members should be appointed for 3-year terms, but with some flexibility for the first term so that all members do not rotate off at the same time.
- This Advisory Board should guide the Director of SUP on strategy, planning and vision and advise the Provost on all matters respecting the Press.
- Over the next five years, it should also receive an annual report from the Press about its editorial direction and structure and evaluate progress toward stated goals.
- It should also assist the Press in conceiving and implementing fundraising strategies and furnish input on promising editorial strategies.
- This Advisory Board should convene three times per year and its first task should be to create bylaws for itself.

**Selection and Operation of Editorial Boards:** Within the presses that we consulted, the membership on some of the editorial boards is officially selected by the directors of the presses, and on others the

director is consulted to a greater or lesser extent but the President or Provost officially invites people to serve.

More often, the President or Provost bears the responsibility of inviting members to the editorial board, while leaving the director of the press with input but not control of the composition of the group. The Director of Columbia University Press suggests names to the Provost, whom the Provost then appoints, unless there is an objection. At Michigan, new members are recommended by the Executive Committee and press acquisition editors for consideration by the Director, who then passes on the recommendations to the Dean of the Library, who issues the invitations to serve. At Johns Hopkins, the press's director and editorial director select the editorial board, although letters of invitation come from the university's president. At Chicago, appointments to the Board of University Publications, which is a statutory board of the University, are made by the Provost and the press is asked to suggest potential members and a chair, resulting in a mix of personnel from the press's recommendations and others added by the Provost. At MIT, the members are appointed by the President, but in practice the press director and editorial director are the people who select them. At Princeton, the editorial board is selected by the President of the university based on recommendations from the director of the press. At Yale, the President of the University appoints the editorial board. The process at the University of Michigan is somewhat unique, in that the board members themselves in conjunction with press acquisition editors recommend new members for consideration by the director, who then passes on the recommendations to the Dean of the Library, who issues the invitations to serve. At the University of California, the Committee on Committees of the Academic Senate appoints the members of the editorial board without any input from the press itself.

Generally, the members of the editorial boards are university faculty and their number ranges from 9 (including Michigan and Columbia) to 26 (at Cornell, where different boards oversee different subject areas of publication). At MIT, the director of the libraries, or her appointee, also sits on the board in an *ex officio* capacity.

Almost all of the boards are charged with approving individual



book contracts. That is not the case with respect to NYU or MIT, however, whose boards serve only an advisory function. Hence at MIT, the board meets only four times a year and provides advice on editorial matters and strategy, with a particular focus on guiding the editorial team through challenging or controversial publishing decisions, while serving as a liaison to the academic community. At Johns Hopkins, the editorial board reviews all projects before contracts are issued, and the press strives for a consensus decision, but the role of the board is advisory and the ultimate decision to publish rests with the director. The boards that approve individual contracts meet more frequently than those that do not and generally convene once a month.

Many of the presses, including Columbia, Chicago, Washington, Michigan, and Johns Hopkins, appoint members to the editorial board for terms of 2–3 years. Some have term limits, such as Columbia's, Johns Hopkins', and Michigan's restriction of board members to two consecutive terms. Members of Princeton's editorial board enjoy somewhat longer stints, each serving for five years, during the final year of which the member becomes chair. At Harvard, there are no designated terms, and some members have stayed on for over twenty years.

The presses likewise vary in terms of how specifically they prescribe what fields faculty members on the editorial board should be drawn from. Most presses emphasize a mix of faculty from different disciplines. Sometimes this might result in more than one faculty member from the same department serving on the committee at the same time, due to joint appointments and interdisciplinary work, for example at the University of Michigan. The bylaws of other presses encourage the editorial boards to be diverse, covering the range of departments at the university. The members of the SUP editorial board have been generally drawn from departments representing areas in which the Press is strong, but at large presses with a broad mandate like Harvard an effort is made to represent as many schools and disciplines as possible. At Cornell, because of the range of disparate materials that the press publishes, there are three faculty boards, one for industrial and labor relations (the ILR imprint), another for science (the Comstock imprint), and a third for humanities and social sciences.

**Alter the Makeup of the Editorial Board:** Although the historical record does not demonstrate exactly how this happened, at some point in the past, the relationship between Stanford’s Faculty Senate and the Editorial Board was broken. This has disrupted faculty governance of the Press and contributed to diminished contact and communication between the faculty and the Press. It has also meant that the Board sometimes has insufficient numbers of members. Additionally, a number of the presses we surveyed have rules against duplication of departments or fields on their editorial boards, with the aim of rendering the editorial board more broadly representative, a practice not shared by SUP’s Editorial Board.

The SUP Editorial Board also lacks opportunities for reviewing the overarching vision of SUP as well as reporting on its operations to the University. As it currently functions, the Editorial Board approves individual contacts but does not weigh in on the Press’s editorial strategy. Nor does it furnish an account of its annual operations. Furthermore, the Editorial Board does not approve the contracts for some series, which is inconsistent with best practices at other university presses. Thus:

**Recommendation 4. The Committee on Committees of the Faculty Senate should select members of an Editorial Board of between 10 and 15 members, and the Provost’s office should invite these potential members to serve for 3-year terms, renewable once, with no more than two members from any single department serving at a time.**

The Faculty Senate’s charge to the Editorial Board should be revised to include broader representation on the Board, particularly with respect to areas in which the Press plans to publish but has not already developed a list, and require that some meetings be devoted to consideration of the Press’s overarching editorial vision. This Editorial Board should approve every book the Press plans to publish. The Chair of the Board should submit an annual report of the Board’s discussions, actions, and recommendations to the Provost no later than August 1st of the committee year.

**Alignment with the University’s Areas of Strengths:** The question of alignment between university presses and the universities with

which they are affiliated has recently risen to prominence at a number of universities. Among the press directors we spoke with, there were varying views on the extent to which the press's publications aligned with areas of strength at the university. Among those who noted that they had strong lines of publication in fields less emphasized by their university (including Harvard, Cornell, Duke, and NYU), many noted that it was important to balance the desire to bring a press and university into greater alignment with the danger that reducing or eliminating current areas of strength might undermine the press's reputation or eliminate a valuable outlet for excellent scholarship produced at other institutions.

Recent reviews of Columbia University Press and Duke University Press called for increasing the alignment of the presses with the university. Likewise, the director of the University of Washington Press was asked to bring it into greater alignment with the university when brought on board, and the previous director of Cornell University Press worked to connect it more thoroughly with the university. In general, the advice of the various press directors to us was not to stop publishing in fields that represent current areas of strength for Stanford University Press but rather to attempt to bind the Press to the university in various ways by maintaining close contact with department chairs in the humanities and social sciences, speaking with them frequently about the directions that their fields are taking, and attempting to partner with local faculty on book series and other initiatives through which the Press can provide value for members of the university community.

MIT Press is an example of a press which self-consciously chose to align with the university and this has, in part, enabled it to engage in successful fundraising.

**Move Toward Greater Alignment with University Scholarship:** Both our surveys of other presses and our discussions with Peter Berkery, Executive Director of the Association of University Presses and with our external review committee suggested that many presses are currently considering and developing strategies to facilitate greater alignment between themselves and their universities. We recognize that achieving greater alignment is complicated because it should

not come at the cost of sacrificing existing areas of strength, nor can it always be easily achieved. At the same time, other presses have found it possible to move incrementally in this direction. Thus:

**Recommendation 5. The Advisory Board, Editorial Board, and Director of SUP should devise strategies for increasing the alignment of the Press with Stanford University, particularly through expanded outreach to faculty across the university.**

The Press needs to have deeper and wider relationships with the faculty. In order to facilitate these relationships we suggest consideration of the following

a. The University should assign a room on campus that can be used as a base of operation for the editorial team.

b. The Press should consider a regularized calendar in which they participate in university events that facilitate their meeting potential authors. Editors of the Press should be present at events at the Humanities Center, attend conferences in areas of interest to the Press, should visit and have a relationship with visitors at CASBS, and should be aware of new initiatives in teaching that could potentially lead to publications.

## **5 Recommendations on Finance**

The academic publishing business is more challenging than ever. Many university presses, including Stanford University Press, are experiencing a decline in the demand for print monographs. In 2016, the press director at the University of Michigan stated in *Inside Higher Ed* that there is a “collapse of the market for print monographs.” We know that libraries are buying fewer copies, and that they are sharing their resources more broadly with one another, contributing to the lower demand. Even without declining sales, the cost of publishing scholarly manuscripts cannot be covered by the sales revenue. A new scholarly book could sell as few as 150 copies in its first year, yet still be an important scholarly contribution. Some of the more financially successful presses have been able to

diversify their revenue sources. Johns Hopkins and MIT publish successful journals; the University of Chicago produces journals and runs a profitable distribution center. SUP, however, has only one main revenue source – book sales, both print and digital.

For this reason, SUP has relied on subsidies from the University in nearly every year since 1995. Some central university support is not uncommon for university presses whose sole focus is book sales. The presses at Harvard, Princeton, and Yale also rely exclusively on book sales, but these peers benefit from substantial endowment support, providing between 15–25 percent of their total budget. SUP, in contrast, has a tiny endowment that provides only four percent of its budget. Consequently, SUP has needed and has received an infusion of general funds in the range of 1–1.7 million dollars per year in order to meet its obligations. This is proportionally a more significant level of support from general university funds than is found at other university presses.

Since taking over the Press, Director Alan Harvey has achieved a number of internal improvements in operations. Even so, the Press continues to sustain a structural deficit. In 2014 he moved international distribution to Combined Academic Publishers, who took over all territories outside of North and South America. In 2015, he changed the structure of the marketing department, allowing for an increase in marketing staff and increasing the visibility of authors and books. In 2017 he moved the press to a new North American distributor, Ingram Academic, which increased the number of sales representatives and took advantage of Ingram’s advanced warehouse and print-on-demand systems.

The external review committee, while stating that continued efficiencies have to be part of the vision going forward, praised the efforts made to date and felt that the Press seemed to be controlling cost of sales and operating expenses. Not surprisingly, they noted that Stanford’s location in the heart of Silicon Valley adds substantially to the Press’s cost structure through higher staff salaries compared to peer university presses. At roughly 50 percent of the annual budget, staff compensation is the biggest driver of expense growth. Alan Harvey noted in his most recent budget letter that publishing jobs have traditionally been low-paid and that for many

years the Press was able to mimic the salary structures of its peer university presses, as well as the primarily East Coast commercial publishers. That is no longer the case, and the Press may need to increase salaries both to address retention concerns and to attract the talent necessary to propel the Press forward under a new strategy.

It is clear that running an academic press based on book sales alone will not produce a balanced budget. It is also clear that the Stanford University Press most likely will require an ongoing subsidy from the university. Both our committee and the external review committee strongly believe that part of the strategy going forward should include re-examining the balance of what the Press publishes. In particular, an accommodation should be made for books that have greater sales potential than monographs.

Endowments furnish a crucial source of support for those presses that do not have a robust journal publishing program; even presses that did not traditionally possess large endowments are beginning to raise them. Princeton, Harvard, and Yale all boast substantial endowments. Chicago and Johns Hopkins, which each raise a huge amount of revenue from journals, also have small endowments covering book publishing in specific fields. Chicago also has a Funds Functioning as Endowment account that is intertwined with the university's endowment, which is not restricted other than by the university's rules regarding the use of endowment payouts.<sup>3</sup>

In recognition of the fact that the Press cannot break even in the near term and is unlikely ever to be able to break even based on book sales alone, thus, we recommend the following:

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<sup>3</sup>The Director of MIT Press, Dr. Amy Brand, developed a strategic plan shortly after arriving at the Press four years ago. In partial fulfillment of this plan, she developed the Knowledge Futures Group with the support of Stanford alumnus Reid Hoffman, among others. The Knowledge Futures Group aims "to transform research publishing from a closed, sequential process, into an open, community-driven one, by incubating and deploying open source technologies to support both rapid, open dissemination and a shared ecosystem for information review, provenance, and verification. The partnership is the first of its kind between an established publisher and a world-class academic lab devoted to the design of future-facing technologies."

Columbia University Press now has a full-time development officer on staff. She works independently for the Press but tries to engage the Office of Alumni and Development in the Press's needs. MIT Press has created a half-time position for resource development to help with gifts and grants. The University of Washington Press director stressed the importance of having a development person on the press staff (even if only half-time), having apparently seen that the Development Office itself has too many other competing interests to serve the needs of the press satisfactorily.

**Recommendation 6. The University should continue to provide a financial backstop for the Press for at least another five years.**

a. The amount of support should be in the range of 1.5–1.7 million, which is a comparable level of support that the Press has received in the past.

b. We believe that the support should be a mix of one-time funds, base funds, and funds from an increased endowment. That mix should be determined by the Provost in line with the development of a strategic plan and a new vision for growth.

c. To signal support, we recommend that in this budget year, a substantial portion of this support, around 500,000 dollars, immediately be converted to base funding to demonstrate to the community the University’s ongoing commitment to the Press.

d. Additional tranches of base funding should be considered as the Press demonstrates measurable progress towards its goals.

e. As well, a plan should be developed to find longer-term support beyond book sales in the form of an expanded endowment. The Press should be given the opportunity to fund-raise for 10 million dollars, allowing them to displace roughly a third of the current one-time general funds subsidy. The Development Office should be tasked with helping them in this endeavor.

f. The financial plan should be announced as soon as feasible

The recommendation for a dual reporting relationship to a senior financial officer over the next five years will be critical to helping the Press achieve its fiscal goals. Another review of these recommendations should take place at that time.

## **6 Recommendations on a Strategy for Moving Forward**

For a complex enterprise like a university press, proper planning is essential for long-term success. It is the committee’s impression that

planning to date for the Press has been largely informal and ad hoc, with very little of it committed to writing and available for review. We see a real opportunity and an urgent need to improve the strategic planning of the Press, so as to create the conditions for effective and visionary leadership, informed and positive oversight, and a strong and mutually beneficial participatory relationship between the Press and the faculty and administration of the University. To reach that goal, we offer a set of recommendations and suggestions on the operation of the press itself.

**Recommendation 7. The Director of SUP should be required to develop a long-range strategic plan in consultation with members of the Advisory Board and members of the Editorial Board.**

a. This plan, which should lay out a vision for the development of the Press for the next five-year and ten-year periods along with a strategy for realizing that vision, should be submitted in writing to the Provost.

b. In future years the plan should be periodically revisited and revised.

c. The plan should constitute one of the bases for regular review by the Provost and the Advisory Board of the performance of the Press and of its Director.

In our view, the formulation of the strategic plan should be primarily the responsibility of the Director of the Press. We suggest, however, that it should include, among other things, the following:

a. Detailed consideration of new fields and areas that the Press might attempt to develop, including textbooks, a larger business inventory and publications in departments in which the University is strong. This includes the professional schools, education, law, medicine and business as well as humanities and sciences.

b. Detailed consideration of existing fields and areas that the Press might retain or strengthen, or, alternatively, scale back or withdraw from.

c. Concrete proposals for enhancing the Press's connections with the faculty of the University, so as to enable the Press (a) to take



better advantage of, and reflect, acknowledged areas of academic excellence at Stanford, (b) to enlist the expertise of Stanford faculty in pursuing its goals and developing a distinctive profile, and (c) to achieve optimal balance in the range of authors it publishes (e.g. between junior and senior scholars).

d. Strategies to increase the number of authors from top universities who publish with the Press.

e. Concrete proposals for initiatives which might be particularly suitable for fundraising, especially those which might capitalize on exciting new developments at Stanford and be pursued with the support of the relevant faculty.

**Recommendation 8. In addition to creating a long-range strategic plan, the Director of the Press should submit an annual report to the Provost and the Advisory Board of the past year's activities (e.g., number and distribution of submissions received, number and distribution of volumes published, etc.), initiatives with local and external faculty and performance and progress generally as measured against the goals specified in the long-range strategic plan.**

## 7 Summary of Recommendations

In summary, our above recommendations can be enumerated as follows:

1. We recommend that the reporting relationship be changed so that the Press again reports directly to the Provost.

2. We recommend that the Press report additionally to one of two budget officers, either to the Vice President for Business Affairs and Chief Financial Officer or to the Vice Provost for Budget and Auxiliaries Management.

3. We recommend that the Provost create a Stanford University Press Advisory Board and appoint twelve members.

4. We recommend that the Committee on Committees of the Faculty Senate select members of an Editorial Board of between 10

and 15 members and that the Provost's office invite these potential members to serve for 3-year terms, renewable once, with no more than two members from any single department serving at a time.

5. We recommend that the Advisory Board, Editorial Board, and Director of SUP devise strategies for increasing the alignment of the Press with Stanford University, particularly through expanded outreach to faculty across the university.

6. We recommend that the university backstop the press for another five years.

7. We recommend that the Director of SUP should be required to develop a long-range strategic plan in consultation with members of the Advisory Board and members of the Editorial Board.

8. We recommend that in addition to this long-range strategic plan, the Director of the Press should submit an annual report to the Provost and the Advisory Board of the past year's activities that includes performance and progress against the goals specified in the long-range strategic plan.