



Dr. Marc Tessier-Lavigne
Office of the Provost
Building 10
Stanford University
Stanford, CA 94305-2061

Dr. Persis Drell
Office of the Provost
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Stanford University
Stanford, CA 94305-2061

30 April 2019

Dear President Tessier-Lavigne and Provost Drell,

I am writing in response to the recent news that Stanford University has proposed the elimination of institutional financial support for Stanford University Press. The Association of University Presses (AUPresses) is a global community of 151 publishers whose mission is to ensure academic excellence and cultivate knowledge—Stanford University Press has been a member in good standing since our founding in 1937. As the Executive Director of AUPresses as well as a former university press publishing executive, I would like to correct some misperceptions that appear to have informed this decision and to offer the Association’s resources to the faculty committee you have charged with assisting the Libraries and Press in identifying next steps.

Stanford University Press (SUP) is widely admired by publishing colleagues and scholars around the world. Its books regularly win awards: most recently, *Crook County: Racism and Injustice in America's Largest Criminal Court* has won multiple awards, including a top disciplinary honor, the Distinguished Scholarly Book Award from the American Sociological Association; *The High Cost of Good Intentions* won the Manhattan Institute’s Hayek Prize; and *The Green Bundle* became the latest in a long line of SUP titles to be recognized with an Axiom Business Books Award.

SUP is also one of our community’s preeminent innovators in digital publishing, recognized with multiple grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and others for its path-breaking work in .supDigital. This work is likely to impact the future of scholarly communications across almost all humanities and social sciences, as well as book-based science and professional fields.

While unique in its disciplinary expertise, SUP has a profile that is common within AUPresses: it is a book-focused publisher, whose service to scholars, readers, and the university is supported by sales, grant awards, and an institutional budget allocation. It also bears mentioning that SUP’s current editorial mix was carefully tailored in the early 2000s to align with university priorities and strengths.

University presses contribute enormously to their institutions’ prestige—79% of AAU institutions have presses, as do 71% of R1 universities. They also provide a demonstrable return on an institution’s investment. “At its core, university press publishing represents impressive stewardship and amplification of initial resource allocations, an extension of the parent institution’s brand to a variety of audiences, and the global advancement of research,” write AUPresses past-president Darrin Pratt and AUPresses past-treasurer Susan Doerr in [a recent essay in University Business](#).

Observers sometimes point to the rare university presses—such as those at Oxford or Johns Hopkins—that regularly generate an operating surplus. However, it is essential to note that these surpluses are not generated through book publishing programs, but rather via some combination of robust journals lists, publishing and platform services, and distribution services, all of which required an investment of capital and time

Eliminating all institutional funding precipitously will never right-size a publishing operation, but destroy it. Successful press reconfigurations are planned, implemented, and assessed over years, matching the demands of the university press mission. Every book, after all, proceeds from the prospective author's submission of a manuscript through the essential processes of peer reviewing, contracting, copyediting, designing, producing, promoting, and distributing, a chain of events that also generally takes several years. Many books are now at each of those stages in the offices of SUP.

Risking the closure of a university press creates the potential for extraordinary reputational and legal consequences. The reverberating outcry from communities of scholars, alumni, and communities often comes as a surprise to universities making decisions similar to what is being contemplated by Stanford. Internally, unilateral administrative decisions affecting university presses raise questions about university governance, including protest from faculty editorial boards already tasked with press engagement and oversight. Significantly, unexpected announcements which call into question a press's future viability can immediately harm ongoing acquisitions efforts, and may give rise to potential breach of contract claims for its new and forthcoming books. Finally, unless they have fallen into the public domain, a press's thousands of backlist titles present ethical and even legal questions of stewardship and responsibility.

In recent years, as universities have struggled with budget challenges, AUPresses has on occasion marshaled its substantial statistical data and other resources to assist an institution's leadership in making evidence-based decisions to shape the future scope and direction of its university press. We provide data, connections to industry experts, and at the smallest presses can help support an independent review of press operations.

We encourage you to consider more deeply the decision to eliminate a budget allocation for SUP and also to:

- confirm your unequivocal commitment to Stanford University Press, and reassure its community of authors, reviewers, and readers;
- recognize there is nothing unusual or untoward in a university press's book publishing program receiving financial support from its parent institution; and,
- include nonprofit scholarly publishing expertise in your future decision-making.

The leadership and staff of the Association of University Presses stand ready to support you in such an approach in any way possible.

Sincerely,



Peter J. Berkery
Executive Director

cc: Professor Judy Goldstein
Professor Ronald Egan
Professor Roland Greene

Professor Jay Hamilton
Professor Paul Harrison
AUPresses Board of Directors