25 April 2019

Dear President Tessier-Lavigne and Provost Drell,

We, the undersigned, write to express our concern about the announced plan to eliminate the modest base subsidy to the Stanford University Press. We believe this will cripple the press with likely fatal results. In particular, we would like to express our strong belief that any decision about drastic restructuring at the Press should be made only after full consultation and well-prepared discussion in the academic senate, with a chance for all members of the university community to be heard. Moreover, we urge that any decision be based on a careful examination of the Press’s operations by an external committee of experts with experience in academic publishing who can offer an assessment of the Stanford University Press and suggestions for improvement.

University presses serve a vital need, disseminating scholarly work and communicating the results of academic research. They exist expressly in order to publish works that are not necessarily commercial. Accordingly, they operate by design at a loss, which is made up by a combination of endowment income (both Harvard and Princeton have endowments of over $100 million), journal income, fundraising and subsidies from their universities. The small annual subsidy the Press receives pays dividends in the form of wide-ranging lists that showcase a variety of academic disciplines and, because of the Press’s reputation for excellence and thoughtfulness, regularly compete for authors with much larger and better-funded presses. Eliminating the base subsidy will not only undermine an important venue for scholarship but will also send an extremely unfortunate signal about Stanford’s commitment to scholarship in the arts, humanities and social sciences—all fields of inquiry vital to a world class university, as indeed is a strong university press.

As historians, we would also like to point out that the present moment, with the world of learning, knowledge and scholarship under daily political assault, is an especially inopportune time to flag in our support for the dissemination of knowledge and the results of academic research.

We hope you will reconsider any decision to eliminate the subsidy to Stanford University Press and urge you to, at the very least, present any such decision to the academic senate for discussion to ensure you have a complete picture of the value of the Press.
Sincerely,
Matt Sommer, Chair, History Department
Jessica Riskin, Vice Chair
Professor Keith Baker
Professor Jennifer Burns
Professor Gordon Chang
Professor David Como
Professor James P. Daughton
Professor Rowan Dorin
Professor Paula Findlen
Professor Zephyr Frank
Professor Estelle Friedman
Professor Jonathan Gienapp
Professor Fiona Griffiths
Professor Gabrielle Hecht
Professor Allyson Hobbs
Professor Katherine Jolluck
Professor Nancy Kollmann
Professor Yumi Moon
Professor Thomas Mullaney
Professor Norman Naimark
Professor Robert Proctor
Professor Richard Roberts
Professor Aron Rodrigue
Professor Priya Satia
Professor Londa Schiebinger
Professor Matthew Sommer
Professor Peter Stansky
Professor Jun Uchida
Professor Richard White
Professor Kären Wigen
Professor Caroline Winterer
Professor Mikael Wolfe
Professor Ali Yaycioglu
Professor Steven Zipperstein