

# **Formative Evaluation of the Aid to Scholarly Publications Program (ASPP)**

## ***Part II : Context for Scholarly Publishing***

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# 1.0 Context for Scholarly Publishing

This section outlines the larger context of scholarly publishing in which the Aid to Scholarly Publications Program operates. It provides an overview of:

- the mandate, methods and markets of scholarly book publishers;
- scholarly book publishing as conducted in Canada; and
- major current issues and prospects in the field.

## 1.1 Whys and Hows of Scholarly Book Publishing

### 1.1.1 A Service Mandate

Scholarly publishers perform essentially a service function. By publishing peer-assessed scholarly research in book form, publishers provide services to both the research community and universities themselves.

The main aspects of these services include:

- evaluation and editorial enhancement of written scholarship;
- professional design and production of scholarship in book form;
- dissemination of scholarship through academic libraries, bookshops, wholesalers, the Internet and other channels; and
- provision of a means for judging scholarly achievement and qualifications for promotion within the university system.

Seen in this context, scholarly publishers are not driven by a mandate to make a profit. The great majority of them are affiliated with a university, even if incorporated separately from it. They bear many similarities to their colleagues in the commercial publishing industry, but only in the sense that they use industrial means to achieve fundamentally non-commercial ends.

Scholarly presses serve the research community on the macro level by publishing scholarly “monographs” – books on a single subject or theme which make an original

contribution to knowledge – and thus ensuring that research funded by universities and government bodies is disseminated in a practical, accessible medium, nationally and internationally.

On the micro level, scholars benefit from scholarly publishing in several ways. They receive access to the latest research conducted by their peers; access a means of professionally recognized peer evaluation and dissemination for their own research; and achieve what is often a *sine qua non* of professional tenure and prestige, publication of their work in book form.

To a considerable extent, it could be argued, the processes of scholarly enquiry and professional advancement, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, depend on scholarly publishing. As Cathy N. Davidson, vice-provost for interdisciplinary studies at Duke University, wrote recently: “A book and several refereed articles have been the price of admission to tenure in the humanities and social sciences for decades” (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 3, 2003).

### **1.1.2 Scholarly Presses**

Scholarly presses grew out of the need for scholars to communicate with other scholars in their field. Because they developed to serve the university-based research community, the great majority of scholarly presses are linked in one way or another to a university. A scholar with a large message for the reading public – a Marshall McLuhan, a Claude Levi-Strauss, a Stephen Hawking – will eventually publish with a commercial press. But almost invariably, such writers begin their publishing careers with university presses – often with one based at their own institution. Not all universities operate presses, however, and most university presses are open to publishing scholars from other institutions, provided their work falls within a field in which the press specializes.

As a scholarly press grows and becomes active in more disciplines and more markets, it generally achieves greater autonomy. It acquires its own professional staff, develops its own policies and procedures, and may begin operating at greater arm’s length from university faculty and administration. While some presses remain wholly owned by their parent institution, others have become separately incorporated to operate with greater administrative and financial flexibility.

University presses almost always receive, nonetheless, various benefits from the parent institution: tangible benefits such as operating subsidies or subsidized physical infrastructure; or intangible ones such as institutional prestige or access to authors and manuscripts. Separately incorporated or not, university presses remain not-for-profit for legal and tax purposes.

University presses publish the great majority of scholarly books in North America and Europe. But a not insignificant proportion appears from private, for-profit publishers. These are usually companies specializing in college textbooks and course materials, which already operate in the academic market; or they may be smaller literary or regional presses with specialized interests, extending to the occasional scholarly study in their area of expertise. In such cases, publishers are likely to originate scholarly works without expectation of profit, but with the hope of ancillary benefits such as maintaining good relations with authors, or because they consider such works culturally important.

### **1.1.3 Peer Review and Other Press Methods**

University presses and for-profit publishers differ in significant ways apart from their legal incorporation and financing. A major difference lies in their method of selecting manuscripts for publication and preparing them for the press.

A university press typically employs editors with expertise in one or more broad academic disciplines. These are usually linked to the university's own areas of strength, whether medieval studies, political science, history, literature, law, medicine, forestry, etc. In addition to academic qualifications, scholarly press editors require particular skills. These include a capacity for discerning editorial treatment of advanced research, and for overseeing the press's system of peer review.

Peer review is a process of quality control unique to university presses and rooted in the culture of serious scholarship. Once accepted for consideration by a university press, a scholarly manuscript is assessed not only by in-house editors but by distinguished scholars in the discipline. These scholars may work within the country or abroad. They are asked to evaluate the soundness and currency of the manuscript's research, and its quality as an original contribution to knowledge.

Scholarly press editors normally identify at least two appropriate reviewers to assess each manuscript, obtain their reviews, and make a recommendation to publish, or not, based on the reviews. If the reviews are in conflict, a third assessment may be obtained. The resulting editorial recommendation is submitted to the press's publications committee, consisting of senior scholars from the university. A key factor in the committee's decision may be the author's willingness to undertake prescribed revisions to improve the manuscript, as recommended by the assessors.

Administering this process requires knowledge, experience and skills of a sort not required of editors in conventional publishing houses. The peer-review process is one of the most labour-intensive, time-consuming and costly aspects of scholarly publishing, requiring the expense of maintaining an expert editorial department.

Once a decision is made to proceed with publication of a manuscript, the scholarly press's methods resemble those of commercial publishing. Structural and copy-editing may be handled by an in-house editor or freelance editor, depending on the press's internal staffing. Type, page layout and cover may be designed by an in-house designer or freelance designer. Manufacturing is done at a commercial printer or – in exceptional cases, such as University of Toronto Press – at a press's own printing plant.

Like other publishers, scholarly presses issue semi-annual catalogues as sales tools for marketing their books, particularly to bookstores and target markets of academics. In other respects, the marketing of scholarly titles is specific to the discipline concerned, often focusing on conference book displays and specialized mailing lists. Sales and promotion budgets are constrained by the small market for most advanced scholarly works.

### 1.1.4 The Market for Scholarly Books

The audience for most scholarly books is extremely small, even if that audience is often an international one. There are always exceptions to the rule: Canadian titles such as *The Gutenberg Galaxy* or *The Vertical Mosaic* proved to have “crossover” potential by becoming bestsellers in the trade (non-academic) market, much to the surprise of their publisher. But even scholarly works of intellectual brilliance, originality or undoubted academic importance are usually read mainly by scholars and students.

Scholarly books reach readers either as single-copy purchases made through bookstores, Internet retailers or academic wholesalers; or as lending copies borrowed from university libraries. Academic library purchases have a major impact on a scholarly work’s sales. In fact, it is widely acknowledged that domestic and international library sales account for “the lion’s share of orders received by scholarly presses.” (See “The Future of Scholarly Publishing,” a 2002 report by the Modern Language Association (MLA) in the United States, reprinted in *Journal of Scholarly Publishing*, Vol. 34. No. 2, January 2003.) The interdependence between scholarship and publishing is often described as “publish or perish,” but scholarly publishing itself could perish without a healthy academic library market.

It is therefore highly significant that for the past two decades, academic library purchases of scholarly books have been declining steadily in North America. Several interrelated factors explain this decline. Governments have cut back expenditures on education and on the educational institutions that operate libraries. Compounding that situation, academic libraries themselves have changed their buying patterns. They now invest considerably larger portions of their publications budgets in non-book purchases, particularly journals. A shift in library spending has occurred toward high-priced databases and electronic journals in science and technology, sharply reducing funds available to buy books in the humanities and social sciences.

The MLA report just quoted illustrates the extent of that spending shift by citing findings of the Association of Research Libraries in the United States:

*“...an explosion over the past decade in both the quantity and price of scientific journals has produced a powerful new competitor for library funds. A study*

*conducted by the Association of Research Libraries found that from 1986 to 1997, the unit cost of serials [journals and magazines] rose 169%, compared with 62% for book-length monographs. In response, research libraries' expenditures for serials rose 142%, while their expenditures on monographs rose a mere 30%.”*

The net effect of these changes, according to the Association of Research Libraries, was the following shift in academic library purchasing:

*Table 1.1.4.1 Academic Library Purchases*

	<b>1986</b>	<b>1997</b>
Proportion of library budgets spent on books	44%	28%
Proportion of library budgets spent on journals	56%	72%

The director of the University of Illinois Press, Willis G. Regier, has written that this trend translates into sharply reduced library sales of a typical monograph by an American university press: from 800 or 1,000 copies sold to libraries during the 1980s, to less than half those numbers today (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 13, 2003).

In the same article, Regier attributed these developments to steep price increases for scientific, medical and technology journals generated by the increased presence of multinational publishing conglomerates such as Reed Elsevier and Springer Verlag. Regier also cited an increase in competition for library dollars due to the growing numbers of books published by university presses themselves. With the decline of a library market previously representing half or more of their sales, American university presses have turned increasingly to publishing more titles with “crossover potential” in trade bookstores. That attempted solution to presses’ financial problems has had various problematic consequences, discussed below in section 1.3.2, “Accessibility and Social Relevance.”

These are not American problems only. Similar changes have occurred in Canadian scholarly publishing and the Canadian library market, with similar impacts on our university presses. In addition, because of the international nature of scholarly research and publishing, the market for Canadian university presses is impacted by developments outside the country. The table below compiled by Arden Ford, Business Manager of McGill-Queen’s University Press, for the Association of Canadian University Presses, shows that six English-language scholarly publishers in this

country derive nearly 50 per cent of their sales revenue from exports, primarily to the U.S. They have therefore shared in the fallout from the purchasing shift by American academic libraries. For example, an executive at the University of Toronto Press estimates that his press's sales to academic libraries have lately fallen by close to 50%.

*Table 1.1.4.2 Domestic and export sales of six university presses<sup>1</sup>*

	2003	2002	2001
Domestic Sales	\$5,189,187	\$5,589,256	\$5,518,848
Export Sales	\$5,006,713	\$5,084,892	\$5,391,593
Total Sales	\$10,195,900	\$10,674,148	\$10,910,441
Export as % Total Sales	49%	48%	49%
<i>Reporting presses: UTP, MQUP, UBCP, UAP, WLUP, PIMS</i>			

### 1.1.5 Subsidy for Scholarly Publishing

As stated by Cathy N. Davidson in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* article cited earlier: “The bottom line is that scholarly publishing isn’t financially feasible as a business model – never was, never was intended to be, and should not be. If scholarship paid, we wouldn’t need university presses. Without a subsidy of one kind or another, scholarly publishing cannot exist.”

Subsidy is necessary because the low (and slow) sales of scholarly works do not generate enough revenue to cover the costs of publishing them. Subsidy comes from various sources, including the volunteer work of assessors in conducting peer evaluation of manuscripts. The two main sources of direct subsidy are the universities that operate scholarly presses and funding programs that provide publication grants.

Parent universities may provide operational subsidies and also subsidies in kind, such as reduced office rents or access to computer facilities. But inevitably, recent financial pressures on universities have translated into cost-cutting measures that affect the amount of subsidy available to university presses. According to the MLA report, “The Future of Scholarly Publishing”:

<sup>1</sup> A. Ford, Association of Canadian University Presses/Association des presses universitaires canadiennes, January 7, 2004.

*Worries about the ability of scholarly publishers to remain financially solvent have been expressed since the 1970s, as universities have increasingly rescinded substantial portions of their subsidies to the presses affiliated with them... In fact, as Sanford Thatcher, director of Pennsylvania State University Press, points out, it is probably more accurate to speak of a 'chronic illness' than a 'crisis.' Nonetheless, fears about the financial health of university presses have increased dramatically in recent years.*

Given declining institutional subsidies and declining library sales of their books, it is understandable if scholarly presses rely more than ever on publication grants.

Grants come in a variety of forms, including internal subsidies generated by a press's sales of occasionally profitable titles; these may be reference works, undergraduate textbooks or books published for a general trade market. Particularly in the U.S., some larger, more established presses may also have access to endowments created to generate income for producing specialized scholarly works. And foundation grants may be available for particular titles or publishing programs in the foundation's areas of interest. Such support may come from large foundations such as the Rockefeller or Ford foundations, or from bodies dedicated to particular disciplines, such as the Donner Foundation, which funds research in public policy, or the Hanna Institute, which supports books on the history of medicine.

In the U.S., the National Endowment for the Humanities provides some tax-based public support for American scholarship; but a hostile political climate has prevented NEH funding from addressing the growing financial needs in the field. According to the MLA report, "reductions in the budget of the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1996 made critical inroads into important editing projects." Although in 2000 Congress voted the first funding increase for the NEH in four years, the MLA considered the renewed support insufficient "to ensure the continuation of crucial literary and historical editions...[or] to initiate new projects of significant magnitude..."

Whereas in the U.S. taxation law encourages greater funding of scholarly publishing through private foundations, in Canada the situation is reversed. In this country, public programs play a much larger and more critical role in bridging the gap between costs and revenues. Particularly important for Canadian scholarly books is the Aid to Scholarly Publications Program (ASPP) funded by SSHRC.

## 1.2 Scholarly Publishing in Canada

### 1.2.1 Historical Background

Scholarly book publishers have been firmly established in Canada in both official languages for only slightly over 50 years. Les Presses de l'Université Laval was founded in 1950, becoming the first university press in Quebec. In 1953, Marsh Jeanneret assumed directorship of the University of Toronto Press, completing the foundations of UTP's book publishing program begun in the late 1940s.

As previously mentioned, the ASPP began providing grants for Canadian scholarly books in 1941-42; but the domestic infrastructure for university publishing was then so underdeveloped that most academic authors had to seek publication abroad, mainly in the U.S., the U.K. or France. UTP, for example, although founded in 1901, concentrated for its first half-century on its printing, bookstore and journal operations, rather than book publishing. The University of Ottawa Press had been publishing some titles in both French and English since 1936, but its program was modest.

On his arrival at UTP, Jeanneret, an experienced publisher of school textbooks, initiated a far-ranging program and found financial resources to support it from both inside and outside the university. Similarly, Université Laval created a substantial capability for issuing original scholarly research, as well as academic textbooks. At last it was possible for Canadian scholars working in either language to be professionally published in their own country. In 1961, these two presses concluded an agreement to co-publish the most ambitious, ongoing editorial project in Canadian history: the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography / Dictionnaire biographique du Canada*.

Over time, other Canadian universities founded their own presses. McGill University Press began operations in 1960, les Presses de l'Université de Montréal in 1962. In both cases, Jeanneret and other publishing colleagues responded to requests for advice on best practices in conducting a scholarly publishing program. These publishers felt that their own presses' best interests lay in encouraging the involvement of other universities in scholarly publishing, since a burgeoning academic research community required more outlets for publication than UTP and Laval could provide.

University of Manitoba Press appeared in 1967; les Presses de l'Université du Québec and University of Alberta Press in 1969; University of British Columbia Press in 1971; Wilfrid Laurier University Press and University College of Cape Breton Press in 1974; and University of Calgary Press in 1981. Thus a considerable network of Canadian scholarly publishers came into existence, becoming at times the envy of private-sector colleagues who tended to see them as the pampered playthings of their parent institutions.

But as Jeanneret made clear in his memoir *God and Mammon: Universities as Publishers*, issued in 1989, sponsoring universities have not been lavish with financial support to underwrite scholarly publishing. UTP worked under constant pressure to generate profits from more commercial projects, such as Yousuf Karsh's *Portraits of Greatness*, in order to finance deficits incurred on scholarly works. "The question that was left unresolved," Jeanneret wrote, "...was whether or not a university press should have to depend on profits from the market-place to discharge the scholarly-publishing responsibilities of its parent institution." That is a question that engages Canada's scholarly publishers more than ever today.

### **1.2.2 Canada's Scholarly Publishing Community**

Canada's scholarly publishing community comprises not only the network of university presses just outlined, but a variety of private-sector presses. It could also be said to embrace scholarly researcher-authors, reviewers and readers, as well as the institutions that support the publication and dissemination of scholarly research, whether as universities, funding bodies or libraries.

The university press community is small and closely knit. Press directors, editors and marketing personnel communicate frequently and interact at learned congresses and conferences. They meet at international book fairs such as BookExpo America, the annual meeting of the Association of American University Presses, and the Frankfurt, Paris or London fairs, where they seek co-publishing arrangements with foreign scholarly presses by buying or selling territorial rights to individual works. And they collaborate on issues of common welfare through the Association of Canadian University Presses (ACUP).

ACUP is a relatively informal professional body, without a permanent paid secretariat but supported by staff resources at member presses. ACUP is also unique in Canadian publishing in representing anglophone and francophone presses and working on behalf of both language groups in the scholarly publishing field.

Appropriately, given the international nature of scholarship and scholarly publishing, Canadian presses participate actively in international bodies, such as the Association of American University Presses (AAUP). This highly collegial organization has contributed to the professional development of Canadian scholarly publishing. Two Canadian publishers, Marsh Jeanneret and Peter Milroy, the latter currently director of University of British Columbia Press, have served as AAUP president, in 1970 and 2003 respectively.

University presses also belong to their respective language-based trade associations, the Association of Canadian Publishers (ACP) and the Association nationale des Éditeurs de livres (ANEL). There they participate alongside private-sector members, some of which also publish scholarly works eligible for support from the ASPP.

Private-sector presses publish scholarly titles as part of a broader program comprising other types of publications. They include academic textbook publishers such as Broadview Press, Fernwood Books, or Garamond Press; general trade publishers such as Boréal Express, Fides, Hurtubise HMH, or Douglas & McIntyre; publishers on society and politics such as Lorimer or Septentrion; or literary presses such as Leméac, XYZ Éditeur, or Talon Books.

### **1.2.3 Economics of Canadian Scholarly Publishing**

Scholarly publishing in Canada operates within severe economic constraints. The underlying reasons are a relatively small population base; a correspondingly small number of universities, researchers and academic libraries to purchase scholarly books; and a lack of support from domestic private foundations.

Offsetting these limitations, the market for much Canadian research and for many Canadian scholarly books is not confined to Canada. Researchers in many disciplines work in an international milieu and can expect an interest in their research from specialist colleagues abroad. In addition, Canada's public funding programs,

particularly at the federal level, help sustain the publishing programs of domestic scholarly presses by supplementing book sales and other income.

Nonetheless, the economics of Canadian scholarly books are stark – as suggested by one university publisher interviewed, who commented, “These are books that commercial presses simply won’t touch.” Her fundamental point was that scholarly publishing, as stated at the outset of this section, is not a commercial activity but an academic service. Hence, she added, “It always needs a subsidy of one kind or another.”

Interviews conducted with publishers at four of Canada’s major university presses, Toronto, Montréal, McGill-Queen’s, and British Columbia, established current average ranges of publishers’ expectations for most Canadian scholarly titles with respect to print runs, sales and rate of sales over a book’s life. These averages vary according to discipline, subject, and reputation of the author:

*Average print runs*

- Single edition, hardcover or paperback: 600 to 1,000 copies
- Dual edition, with hardcover and paper bindings: hardcover up to 300 copies; paperback 500 to 1,000 copies

Even in the case of international co-publications, print runs may be no higher. For a specialized scientific work co-published by les Presses de l’Université de Montréal and les Presses de l’Université Lyons, for example, Montréal took just 300 copies for North America, Lyons 500 copies for Europe.

Economies of scale, seldom available in Canadian trade publishing, are even less attainable with scholarly titles. If the publisher could print more copies, the unit cost of manufacturing each copy would fall, and the gross margin would improve. But the average print runs cited above for scholarly titles are only 20 to 30 per cent of the average printing of a Canadian trade book, on which the publisher might break even on a sale of perhaps 3,000 copies. Short print runs, then, are a major reason for the higher cover prices of scholarly books – although on a strictly commercial basis, their prices should be even higher to reflect their true costs.

Moreover, print runs of scholarly books typically require up to five years to sell out, if they ever do. An average rate of sale, as estimated by one publisher, would be the following:

- 250 copies during the first six months after publication, when the book is purchased by scholars and libraries that must have it;
- 250 copies over the next year;
- 100 to 500 copies over the next three to four years, as the book's reputation becomes established internationally through the slow process of academic journal reviews and word of mouth.

The economic difficulties of high unit costs, inadequate profit margins and low sales are thus compounded by the further problem of slow cashflow. At the end of a scholarly book's economic life (as opposed to its intellectual one), a sizeable publication deficit remains. According to a study conducted in 2000 by the Association of Canadian University Presses, calculating the average publication deficits of a representative sampling of 21 scholarly titles published by ACUP members (10 titles in the humanities and 11 in the social sciences), average deficits per title were as follows:

- Humanities:           \$12,299
- Social Sciences:       \$14,095
- Aggregate:             \$13,240

According to key informant interviews, projected deficits may rise from these levels to \$20,000-25,000 for a particularly large and costly project requiring extensive editorial work, illustrations, colour separations, and high paper, printing and binding costs.

#### **1.2.4 Canadian Support Programs**

Scholarly publishing in Canada maintains its current level of output in part because of financial support from publicly funded grant programs.

At the provincial level, funding for book publishers varies widely and is generally provided by arts councils or their equivalents. At the federal level, three major programs support domestic book publishing. They are, in order of budget magnitude:

- the Aid to Publishers component of the *Book Publishing Industry Development Program* (BPIDP), administered by the Department of Canadian Heritage;
- the *Block Grant Program*, administered by the Canada Council for the Arts;
- the *Aid to Scholarly Publications Program*, administered by the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences (CFHSS), with funds provided by SSHRC.

Although eligibility for these programs is restricted to publishers owned and controlled in Canada, all three programs operate with different objectives and resource levels, as described below. It follows that the programs have separate impacts on scholarly and other publishers receiving their funds. Apart from differences in scale among the programs, some major differences are that:

- only the ASPP is dedicated solely to support of scholarly publication;
- only the ASPP conducts manuscript evaluation and ties its grants to individual titles;
- only the ASPP is considered an author’s program, although in practice its grants are generally awarded to the publisher of the manuscript concerned.

The following table illustrates quantitative scale differences among the three programs’ granting budgets for the 2002-03 fiscal year:

*Table 1.2.4.1 Comparison of Support to Book Publishing Programs*

<b>Program</b>	<b>Year Established</b>	<b>2002-03 Budget*</b>	<b>Approximate # Titles Supported</b>
BPIDP Aid to Publishers	1979	\$27.0 M	5,500
Block Grants	1972	\$8.7 M	2,400
ASPP	1941	\$1.0 M	150

\* Amount does not include allocation for administration.

***BPIDP Aid to Publishers component***

The broad policy goal of the BPIDP is both cultural and industrial: to strengthen the financial viability of the Canadian-controlled publishing industry in order to “ensure choice of and access to books written by Canadian authors, which reflect Canada’s cultural diversity and linguistic reality.”

Other components of the program support the supply chain for book distribution and retailing, industry organizations and projects, and export marketing.

The Aid to Publishers component, at \$27 million, is the largest component in a \$39-million program for the book industry. This component provides annual contributions to some 217 eligible publishers, including 11 university presses and other presses occasionally publishing scholarly works. The 11 university presses are: les Presses de l’Université de Montréal, les Presses de l’Université d’Ottawa, les Presses de l’Université du Québec, les Presses de l’Université Laval, McGill-Queen’s University Press, University of Alberta, University of British Columbia Press, University of Calgary Press, University of Manitoba Press, University of Toronto Press, and Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

BPIDP Aid to Publishers contributions are calculated according to a financial formula based on each publisher’s total sales of eligible (chiefly Canadian-authored) titles. Publishers may allocate the funds to various aspects of their operations at their own discretion. The program entails no assessment of editorial quality or individual manuscripts.

University and other scholarly publishers are strengthened financially by receiving BPIDP funds, but are under no obligation to apply them to particular scholarly titles. The monies may be spent on trade (non-scholarly) books, staff salaries, sales and marketing, administration or other business overheads, for example.

***Canada Council Block Grants***

Block grants are annual lump-sum payments to support eligible publishers’ title output across certain literary categories: fiction, poetry, drama, children’s literature, and creative non-fiction that is “culturally significant.” *Ineligible* categories include textbooks and commercial non-fiction categories such as cookbooks, travel guides, how-to manuals, etc.

Canada Council block grants are intended as a form of support for Canadian literature. They are based on a funding formula related to the number of eligible titles published in the two preceding years, combined with a juried evaluation of each press's program relative to its peers.

Scholarly presses may receive Canada Council block grants, but only for publication of eligible titles as defined by the program. These books must be generally available to the public through trade bookstores: hence scholarly works in the humanities, social sciences or physical sciences intended solely for a specialized academic readership, or primarily for use in university courses, are *ineligible*. It is felt that a tendency of the block grant criteria has been to encourage scholarly presses to publish more trade titles for the general public, rather than research for a purely scholarly readership. The program may have acted as an incentive for some presses, such as Alberta and McGill-Queen's, to begin publishing literary works in poetry and fiction.

#### ***Aid to Scholarly Publications Program***

The ASPP has a quite different objective from the two programs above. It is the only program with a mandate specifically to support publication of Canadian scholarly works in the humanities and social sciences.

Construed at its origins as support for scholarly authorship, the ASPP awards grants to defray the costs of publication of particular manuscripts, as described in 1.0 above.

As a consequence of its mandate, the ASPP has a distinct methodology. Once deemed eligible under program guidelines, each manuscript must pass through the peer review process already described.

Since 2003-04, the ASPP has been operating under a two-year Memorandum of Understanding with Association of Canadian University Presses, under which the usual evaluation process is modified. As administrator of the program, the CFHSS agreed to consider basing ASPP grant decisions on two or more evaluations already obtained by university presses as part of their own peer review, in order to avoid duplication of effort, and to save time and expense in the adjudication process. Nonetheless, the program continues to monitor the qualifications and appropriateness of assessors whose reports are submitted by the university presses. As a program officer put it, "The program is still the guardian of objective peer review." The original ASPP assessment process continues to obtain in cases where the applicant is

an author, a private-sector publisher without peer-review procedures, or where a university press's own evaluations are considered deficient as a basis for funding.

According to an article, "The Aid to Scholarly Publications Program 1940-1983," in the September 1983 issue of *Social Sciences in Canada* by Philip J. Cercone, then ASPP director, the program funded 423 Canadian-authored scholarly books during its first three decades, 1942-71 – an average of about 14 titles per year. But by 1982-83, as a consequence of the rapid development of the humanities and social sciences in Canada, the ASPP was funding 152 titles with grants averaging \$6,100. In that year, the ASPP's subventions budget totalled \$928,450.

During the 20 ensuing years of inflation, the 1982-83 figures have not grown appreciably. In fact, since 1990-91, the ASPP's subventions budget has actually declined slightly – from \$1.13 million to \$1.02 million, while continuing to fund the same number of titles: about 150 per year. This budgetary freeze, in effect, has required the program to limit each grant to a flat \$7,000. This amount covers about 53% of the estimated average scholarly publication deficit of \$13,240 in the ACUP study cited in 2.2.3 above.

The ASPP's flat funding contrasts with both the BPIDP Aid to Publishers component and the Canada Council Block Grant program, which have received substantial budgetary increases in recent years. The \$27-million BPIDP Aid to Publishers has risen from \$16 million in 1996, an increase of 69% over seven years. Meanwhile the Canada Council Block Grants, currently at \$7.9 million in 2003-04, stood at \$6.9 million as recently as 2000, an increase of 14.5% in three years.

It should also be noted that the ASPP appears to be somewhat unique internationally as a national program of support for scholarly book publication: i.e. a publicly funded program providing subsidies on a competitive, peer-reviewed basis to authors and publishers, but not tied to a particular university or other institution. In this respect, the program is similar to other Canadian grant programs for book publishing, which have few direct parallels in the rest of the world.

The closest match for the ASPP would appear to be a program of the British Academy, the U.K. body for the humanities and social sciences, which offers modest publication subventions (maximum 2,000 pounds sterling) "to assist authors to

publish scholarly monographs” and “to help defray production costs in cases where publication would not otherwise be possible.”

The U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities offers grants to researchers to prepare “scholarly editions” of important works and documents in literature, history and other disciplines, intended for publication in book form. Most American scholarly presses, however, rely on their parent university or on private foundations for publications support.

## **1.3 Current Issues and Prospects**

### **1.3.1 Supply and Demand**

The MLA report “The Future of Scholarly Publishing” stated that “the book-length monograph has become the holy grail for receiving [academic] tenure,” yet economic pressures on publishers make it less likely that they can meet the growing demand. As even university presses seek more profitable projects, “younger scholars may well be edged out of the publishing process.” In a letter to members dated May 28, 2002, MLA president Stephen Greenblatt reinforced the point, asserting that this is a systemic problem, and that in the near future a whole generation of young scholars may find their careers in jeopardy.

As in the U.S., the future demands on Canadian scholarly publishers, and therefore on the ASPP, could be prodigious. The academic community may consider the MLA’s recommendation that the humanities and social sciences follow the lead of colleagues in economics and psychology, by accepting peer-reviewed journal articles as a basis for tenure. There could be a further benefit as well, according to the MLA report: “By ceasing to regard book publication as the gold standard for tenure and promotion, universities and colleges would be able to place more emphasis on the quality of publications than on their external format.”

One consequence, as the publishers interviewed attest, is that some new and established scholars are seeking to bypass Canadian presses in order to publish in the U.S., the U.K. or Europe. Scholars may believe that publication abroad is more prestigious, or that foreign publishers can issue their books with less delay, or that Canadian presses are under-resourced or do not publish adequately in their fields, or

that publications funding in Canada is simply too cumbersome and slow to meet their career needs.

### 1.3.2 Accessibility and Social Relevance

In response to converging pressures of reduced institutional funding and lower library sales, many university presses have opted to publish books that are more accessible to a wider public. They have sought books reaching beyond a specialized academic audience to an educated lay readership – for example, titles more relevant to current political events or social issues – in the hope of increasing sales. Such books are sold into the trade market on terms and conditions required by retail booksellers. These include higher discounts and more generous returns and credit arrangements than are usual in selling to libraries or university bookstores.

Willis G. Regier of the University of Illinois Press has argued, in the article cited earlier, that scholarly publishers seeking salvation in the trade market have only created other problems for themselves. The big-box chains that control much of the retail market, particularly Borders and Barnes & Noble in the U.S. and Chapters/Indigo in Canada, have become notorious for ordering books in large quantities and returning most of them for full credit several months later. Book returns, never a serious consideration for scholarly presses in the past, have become a serious, and dangerous, fact of life.

The executive director of the American Association of University Presses, Peter Givler, has colourfully described the financial risks for scholarly presses gambling on the trade market: “Publishing for general audiences, in an effort to generate money for scholarly publishing,” Givler warned, “is a little like playing high-stakes poker to win back what you lost at blackjack” (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 12, 1999).

As an economic basis for publishing, the retail chains’ trade practices are clearly untenable. They illustrate a practical danger inherent in university presses’ being compelled to stray too far from their traditional vocation. A different sort of warning against the drive for greater accessibility was sounded by American historian Frederika J. Teute. Writing in the *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* (January 2001),

Teute argued that such a trend results in a counter-productive lowering of standards and quality in scholarly discourse.

Other observers counter that scholars need to work with, and for, the wider community to ensure that their research is relevant to society's concerns. Public funding for scholarly research is sometimes held up to ridicule in legislatures and the media, on the grounds of overly arcane or "obscure" subject matter. And yet specialized research into Mesopotamian culture, say, has helped us better understand the culture of Iraq and other Middle Eastern states; and scientific enquiry available in book form has helped policymakers deal with national security and civil liberties issues resulting from the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre, and unexpected epidemics such as West Nile Virus or "mad cow disease."

Illustrating the view that Canada must not only conduct and publish scholarly research, but make it available in communities trying to solve local or regional problems, SSHRC has undertaken its "knowledge mobilization" initiative. An important aspect of that initiative is funding Community-University Research Alliances (CURAs). In these projects, academic researchers collaborate with community organizations to address social, economic or environmental issues of high priority for the community. A useful measurement of scholarly publishing's social relevance and accountability may be its openness to becoming involved in disseminating such "applied," as opposed to "pure," research. An interesting question to explore would be the extent to which such research has been published through ASPP-funded titles.

The ASPP (as well as other SSHRC programs) face the challenge of demonstrating the value and the social outcomes of research in the social sciences and humanities in a context of strong competition for public funds for research. Furthermore, in light of increased governmental accountability requirements for the use of public funds, Treasury Board exerts pressure on SSHRC to review its programs, make necessary adjustments, and to cancel ineffective or inefficient programs.

### 1.3.3 Electronic Publishing

Electronic publishing has become widely adopted as a format for the dissemination of scholarly journals. Many journals, especially in science and medicine, have abandoned print altogether to make themselves available exclusively on-line. Increasingly, as reported in the November 2003 *Quill & Quire*, it is expected that journals in the humanities and social sciences may do likewise.

The importance of this development for researchers is illustrated by the Canadian National Site Licensing Project: a \$50-million initiative funded in part by the Canadian Foundation for Innovation, under which 64 Canadian university libraries have negotiated group on-line access to over 750 international scientific and medical journals.

Electronic publishing as it applies to books, scholarly or otherwise, is a somewhat more complex issue.

To date, according to publishing experts, electronic publishing has proved most successful in the case of books that are essentially data-heavy: dictionaries, encyclopaedias, atlases, bibliographies and other types of reference works. *The Canadian Encyclopaedia*, originally published in print format by Hurtig Publishers in the 1980s, has migrated through several CD-ROM versions released by book publisher McClelland & Stewart and is now available on-line, thanks to financial support from the Historica Foundation. The University of Alberta Press is preparing to publish on-line the *Atlas of Alberta Railways*: a compilation of highly detailed, layered maps, illustrations and photographs, with 70 pages of text, which the press considers prohibitively expensive to publish in print format.

These types of publications are comparable to searchable on-line databases, such as library holdings or investment reports, which are particularly appropriate for electronic access. It seems reasonable to expect that on-line publishing in these genres will only increase. The format also offers publishers the benefits of reduced costs for printing, inventory management and physical distribution.

As applied to scholarly monographs or other conventional books consisting largely or entirely of prose text, the case for electronic publishing is less clear. In the trade-

publishing sector, efforts during the past five years to popularize so-called “e-books” have not proved viable. Hand-held devices known as e-book readers, capable of storing the texts of numerous books, were not successfully commercialized. As a result, large publishing and bookselling corporations in the U.S., such as Random House and Barnes & Noble, have closed or curtailed their electronic publishing divisions.

Issues of consumer resistance are essentially practical, and scholarly publishing is not immune. In the case of on-line publishing, viewing an entire book-length text on a computer screen has not proved more acceptable to the great majority of readers than reading it on paper. Many readers evidently feel that it is manageable to read a journal article on-screen, and certainly practical to download the article to one’s printer; but the same cannot be said for a text of 150,000 words and 400 pages.

Although some see the problem as an excessive fixation on book-length works by academic authors and tenure committees, others point to the nature of scholarly enquiry as making the book necessary. As one university press director stated in an interview, “Scholarship in the humanities demands longer treatment. If an author is contemplating large questions, it’s necessary to develop a thesis at some length, so that the reader can absorb the sequence of the author’s ideas.”

Most Canadian university presses have licensed electronic rights to some of their titles to on-line publishers. But press directors have found the financial terms of such licenses onerous, and the resulting sales insufficient to persuade them to do without the printed book. The overarching issue, they contend, is that electronic dissemination does nothing to reduce the largest cost component of scholarly publishing, which is not printing, but the labour-intensive processes of editing and peer-review. Those costs remain the same, no matter the form of dissemination; and therefore revenue from book sales is necessary to cover at least part of them.

A similar point was made by the MLA report already cited. In addition, the report pointed to the fact that: 1) e-book readers and software programs for reading texts on personal computers are not yet standardized or compatible; 2) mechanisms are not yet in place to ensure the permanence of electronic publications, compared to the physical stability of the book; 3) there are fears that large conglomerates will end up owning the content of electronic publishing sources, hindering affordable access by scholars, compared to the ease of borrowing library copies of books; and 4) the issue of peer

review of electronic publications is not yet firmly established as a reliable method of quality control.

One practical solution for electronic dissemination by scholarly publishers, suggested by les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, may involve putting parts of a book-length manuscript, such as an abstract or the 100-page bibliography of a science text, on the Web for more universal access, while publishing the main text in print form.

Another promising mode of electronic dissemination may prove to be both cost-effective and user-friendly. Possibilities abound in the advent of “Print-On-Demand (POD)” technology, where a single copy of a book can be quickly printed and bound to fill a customer’s order. Such technology allows scholarly works to remain in databases and “in print” indefinitely, without the need for bulk reprints that create costly inventory and occupy valuable warehouse space.

At the moment, POD technology is available from only a few sources, such as Xerox Corp., Lightning Print at the giant U.S. book wholesaler Ingram, or Trafford Publishing in Victoria, B.C. The University of Chicago Press, for example, is experimenting with making some titles available through Ingram’s operation. But until this technology becomes more widely installed and used in manufacturing plants and bookstores, where publishers and consumers can access it more easily, its potential to ease the tightening financial pressures on scholarly book publishing will not be clear.