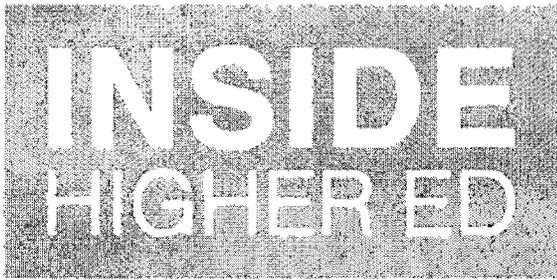


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When University Presses Fail

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Jeffrey R. Di Leo

American literature is slowly going out of business. The publisher of *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes* and *The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson* is closing up shop.

Starting this July, the University of Missouri Press will begin to phase out operations. The press, which was founded in 1958 by a University of Missouri English professor, William Peden, has published approximately 2,000 titles over the course of its history.

Eclectic in its reach, the press has an impressive catalogue that includes offerings in women's studies, African-American studies, creative nonfiction, journalism, and American, British, and Latin American literary criticism. It serves its region with series such as the Missouri Biography Series and Missouri Heritage Readers Series, and American letters in general with series such as the Mark Twain and His Circle Series and the Southern Women Series.

The press's catalogue is deep and rich, and holds gems for both the serious scholar and general interest reader. In addition to the seminal collections of Emerson and Hughes, my own recent favorites are Gail Pool's *Faint Praise: The Plight of Book Reviewing in America* (2007) and Ned Stuckey-French's *The American Essay in the American Century* (2011).

One of the measures of a great university is the strength of its press. Press strength is determined by its catalogue, and its catalogue by the choices of its editors and the impact of its authors. Still, not every prestige indicator is marked in this direction.

For example, the existence of a great university press is neither sufficient nor necessary for membership in the prestigious Association of American Universities.

Last year, University of Nebraska, which operates one of the best university presses in the country, was ousted from the AAU; and Georgia Institute of Technology, which does not run a press, was recently admitted. The University of Missouri will neither be ousted nor even punished by the AAU for closing its press. The AAU criteria favor competitive research financing, not competitive catalogues; faculty in the National Academies, not award-winning university press titles.

University presses are nonprofit enterprises. Though these presses may reach a level of financial self-sufficiency in their operation, they are by and large underwritten by their host universities. This is part of the investment of higher education.

Most of the monographs produced by scholars have a limited audience — and very few make their publishers any money. However, their publication is still an important aspect of scholarly activity and knowledge dissemination.

The University of Missouri system afforded its press a \$400,000 annual subsidy.

To gain a perspective on this figure and the value of the press to the university, one only has to consider that the head basketball coach at Mizzou makes \$1.35 million per year — and the head football coach makes \$2.5 million per year.

The interim director of the press makes just under \$75,000 — less than an assistant baseball coach. The acquisitions editor makes just under \$35,000 — less than an athletic trainer.

Closer to the cost of subsidizing the press are the salaries of the assistant head football coach and the linebacker coach/defensive coordinator, who each make just over \$340,000 per year.

How does one compare a football season to a publishing season? Is an 8-5 season more valuable than 30 books published? Is running a press worth losing an assistant coach or two?

In total, the University of Missouri employs over 17,500 individuals. Currently, the press employs 10 people though in 2009 it was nearly twice that number. The economic crash of 2008 forced many state universities such as the University of Missouri to reassess priorities and scale back.

Mizzou made their priorities clear: in 2010, the University of Missouri's head football coach received a \$650,000 raise.

Louisiana State University, another football powerhouse, slated its university press for closure in 2009. Somehow, this press survived the state budget crisis. However, given that it is nowhere near as popular as their football team, I'm sure that it sleeps with one eye open, waiting for the day that university officials have to decide between a subsidy for the press — and a pay raise for the coach.

Other presses were not so lucky. Eastern Washington University, Southern Methodist University, and the University of Scranton all closed their presses.

And even the celebrated University of California Press tightened its belt by discontinuing a poetry series.

University of Missouri administrators are said to be "hashing out ways to create a new and sustainable model to operate a university press." They also assure us that "any future press won't

look like the current operation."

"We believe the publication of scholarly work is important," said the president of University of Missouri. "We're working very diligently on what" the new press "will look like."

While there is no indication where the University of Missouri administration will go with this, the options here are limited. The most obvious, however, is to go digital. And here there is some precedent.

Though Rice University closed its traditional press in 1996, it reopened in its wake an all-digital press in 2006. According to Eugene Levy, who helped finance the revived press during his term as provost at Rice, the all-digital press was costing Rice \$150,000 to \$200,000 per year. "This was intended as an experiment," said Levy.

Coming from the Andrew Hays Buchanan Professor of Astrophysics at Rice the word "experiment" gains even more gravitas.

Rice hoped to save money by not printing books. Comments Levy, "The hope was that, without the burden of having to maintain a print inventory, the press might sustain itself largely on revenues from print-on demand sales." What the university found out was that there "are base costs that are irreducible" — "and that printing is only one of them."

By 2010, it was determined that there would be no way to recover even the minimal cost of operations. Combine this with slow sales and a fiscal crisis — and the result is a failed experiment.

Rice shut down its all-digital press in the fall of 2010.

However, the decision was not without its detractors.

One of the board members — who wished to remain anonymous — commented that new models of academic publishing are not going to be derived from a sales model. "We're moving to a different era of scholarly communication where it's more accessible to more people, and where we don't have to worry about commercial viability," said the anonymous board member. Humanities publishing is being killed by placing emphasis on commercial viability — "there is no commercial viability," added the board member.

No matter what the form and how diligent the work, a university press requires resources. Just as it takes resources to run a successful athletic program, so too does it take an investment to run a university press.

And comparatively speaking, the costs are negligible: an editor makes less at Mizzou than an athletic trainer, and even the assistant baseball coaches make more than the press director.

Perhaps the solution is not to compare athletic salaries to press salaries but to treat university presses on the same level as athletic programs. Both are auxiliary operations subsidized by the

university, and both play an important role in higher education.

Perhaps we need to measure the scholarly impact of the books published by the press in the same way we measure the impact of the gymnastics or baseball team winning a game or their division. Or think of the cultural capital and prestige generated by the press as akin to the bowl victories or NCAA titles.

And just as we don't scrap athletics if one of our teams loses games or money, we shouldn't scrap university presses if they don't generate enough revenue to cover their operation.

While it may not be the most popular decision for the University of California Press to take one type of book off of their list, if it makes their press more viable in some way; it is akin to downsizing or closing down a sport to make an athletics program stronger.

Think of the \$200,000 invested by Rice or the \$400,000 at Mizzou as the cost of being a strong university — a cost that in the big picture is most likely a fraction of the cost of one athletic coach.

What does it mean when a university press fails? It means not that its authors are not successful or that its press was not run well. Rather it means that its university has abandoned part of its scholarly mission: namely, supporting the publication of books that are the lifeblood of its faculty — and academia itself.

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

UM press pledges to release all contracted books

BY JANE HENDERSON > Post-Dispatch Book Editor • jhenderson@post-dispatch.com |
Posted: Tuesday, June 19, 2012 3:30 am | (0) comments.



"Play Me Something Quick and Devilish" is scheduled for a December publication, but likely will go on sale at least a month earlier.

The University of Missouri Press has seen book orders fall since the system's president announced plans to close the publisher, but the press will release all books in its catalog for 2012.

"The Civil War in Missouri: A Military History" officially pubs in July, but the book by St. Louis historian Louis S. Gerteis is already available.

Likewise, no one should worry about ordering books from the press' fall/winter catalog, says Beth Chandler, the press' marketing manager.

One of those titles is a 170-year history of the Missouri State Penitentiary.

Chandler says another title, the 54-year-old press' last publication, will be its big fall release.

A history of traditional fiddle music in Missouri, "Play Me Something Quick and Devilish" by Howard Wight Marshall, will be an accessible explanation of how old-time fiddle music and dancing traditions came together on the frontier.

The history will look at Scot-Irish and German immigrants, Cherokee families during the Trail of Tears, and Irish railroad workers after the Civil War.

Over the past half-century, the University of Missouri Press published more than 2,000 titles, including the multi-volume "Collected Works of Langston Hughes," books about Mark Twain and biographies of diverse Missourians, such as Rush Limbaugh (the radio host's grandfather).

For the 13-book fall/winter catalog, click [here](#).

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AP Associated Press

MU researcher links childhood obesity, math skills

COLUMBIA -- A University of Missouri researcher reports she has found a link between childhood obesity and poor math skills.

Sara Gable is an associate professor in the university's Department of Nutrition and Exercise Physiology. Her research followed more than 6,250 children from kindergarten through fifth grade.

Gable found that both boys and girls considered obese in kindergarten performed worse on math tests starting in first grade. Fewer gaps were seen in children who became obese when they were older.

She concluded the poor math performance was connected in part to feelings of sadness, loneliness and other shortcoming in social skills.

The study was published in the journal Child Development. Gable collaborated with researchers from the University of Vermont and the University of California, Los Angeles.

Federal health care grants have Mo. connections

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — The latest round of federal health care grants has several connections to Missouri.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services says the University of Missouri-Columbia will receive \$13.3 million to provide primary health care services to Medicare and Medicaid clients. The money is to be used for health information technology and evidence-based treatment plans, among other things.

The surgery-benefits management firm of Welvie LLC — which is based in St. Louis — is receiving \$6.8 million to partner with Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Ohio for a project in that state.

Schizophrenia patients in Missouri and eight other states also will benefit from a \$9.4 million grant to the Feinstein Institute for Medical Research.

Binge-drinking tally falls at MU

Study indicates better checks.

By Brennan David

A recent University of Missouri survey indicates students are having a tougher time buying alcohol in bars and the binge-drinking rate is declining.

POSITIVE BEHAVIORS

Among MU students who drink:

- 80 percent reported using a designated driver.
- 87 percent said they monitor their drink's location.
- 89 percent said they eat before or while drinking.

The following numbers indicate MU students who reported specific consequences of underage drinking:

Did poorly on a test or assignment: 22 percent in 2007, 16 percent in 2012.

Missed class: 39 percent in 2007, 25 percent in 2012.

Blacked out or had memory loss: 41 percent in 2007, 37 percent in 2012.

Source: Wellness Resource Center

A 2012 study by the university's Wellness Resource Center found that 15 percent of students younger than 21 were not checked for identification while purchasing alcohol in bars. That's a decrease from a 2005 study that indicated 38 percent were not checked.

The study also shows 9 percent of students were served because they knew someone at the bar who let them in, down from 29 percent in 2005. Also, 10 percent of students reported using fake IDs, down from 16 percent in 2005.

"Law enforcement has had a lot to do with it," said Kim Dude, director of the Wellness Resource Center. Columbia police "and their downtown unit has made a huge difference. They work with the owners."

The downtown unit — commanded by Sgt. Eric Hughes and supervised by the unit's former commander, Lt. Chris Kelley — has roamed the area since 2009, often on foot, in an effort to establish police presence and relationships with business owners. Some owners have resisted, Hughes said previously, but inroads have been made, and compliance in regard to alcohol sales has improved.

Hughes, Dude and others on the city's Substance Abuse Advisory Commission are working to form a mandatory training program for those who serve alcohol. The committee last year submitted a report to the Columbia City Council on the benefits of combining server training with random police compliance checks.

The proposed ordinance would require all employees associated with the sale or service of alcoholic beverages at any "by-the-drink" or "package alcohol" outlet to complete server training, said Michelle Baumstark, a Columbia Public Schools spokeswoman who serves on the subcommittee.

The subcommittee in August will present a plan to local bar and restaurant owners during the Wellness Resource Center's annual meeting, Hughes said. Public hearings will be held before the ordinance is submitted to the city council.

"Enforcement doesn't work without the education," Hughes said. "This is headway."

The MU student binge-drinking rate has decreased from 51 percent in 2007 to 40 percent this year. Binge drinking is defined as consuming five or more drinks in a two-hour period. Dude said MU's rate is below the national average of 44 percent, and educating students on the risks has been key, she said.

"What we try to teach students is that if you get arrested" as a result of binge drinking, "you not only hurt yourself, but others," she said.

Students in the study reported increases in protective behaviors such as alternating non-alcoholic drinks with alcoholic drinks, deciding on a set number of drinks before going out, using designated drivers and eating before drinking.

Despite the reported improvements, members of the subcommittee say they are unsure what MU's move to the Southeastern Conference might mean for student drinking habits. A new tailgating culture and an increase in traveling fans will be factors.

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The Tribune's View

Tiger Town

Good idea, could be better

By Henry J. Waters III

Most people are all for Tiger Town in some configuration, but the promoters have come up against varying ideas about how to do it.

Tiger Town is an effort to make a fun downtown place for increasing hordes of Southeastern Conference visitors. The essential feature should be making central-city areas more appealing for pedestrian patronage. After debating how far to go with this concept, skeptics have brought pressure to limit the scope of street closures and open-container exemptions, in my opinion fundamentally diminishing the potential of Tiger Town.

My favorite option would be to remove open-container restrictions and close streets from Fourth Street to Hitt Street and Elm Street to Walnut Street. In other words, turn all of downtown into a pedestrian area where crowds could wander at will and merchants could do business on equal footing.

Instead, the plan approved last week by the downtown Community Improvement District board is a cramped version closing only a section of Eighth Street between Broadway and Elm Street where a limited number of booths would be set up for a few merchants to sell food and drink.

This plan has several shortcomings: It limits the potential of the entire area as a fun venue. It requires some authority to set allowable beer prices and choose among merchants for rights to sell in the designated area. It puts temporary sales booths into competition with permanent bars and restaurants. The expressed hope is that visitors will be attracted to Eighth Street and then be more likely to find their way to other downtown businesses. It would be better to attract visitors to the whole of downtown in the first place, letting all merchants operate with equal access to the pedestrian crowd.

The benefit of a pedestrian downtown party zone would extend to local citizens as well as visitors, but a major goal is to send visitors home saying, "Wow, Columbia is a great place to visit. They close off the whole downtown. You can walk everywhere and go from bar to bar and store to store."