Scholarly Presses' Meeting Puts Emphasis on Connections, Not Crises

By Jennifer Howard

Last year the University of Missouri Press was killed and then revived after an outcry from its supporters. The press's plight will be featured in a plenary session at this year's annual meeting of the Association of American University Presses, which begins on Thursday in Boston.

But Missouri's experience won't be held up as an example of how grim the outlook is for scholarly publishers. Instead, it will be one highlight of a program that looks short on crisis talk and long on practical tips and advice about building strong ties on and off the campus, working e-books into publishing strategies, and other hands-on, how-to approaches.

"I didn't want to make it focused on 'How are we going to survive?'" said Brian Halley, Boston editor of the University of Massachusetts Press and chairman of the committee that created this year's program. "Let's talk about how things are working or not working."

Last year the association's president, Peter J. Dougherty of Princeton University Press, played up the idea of the global university press that could find readers and markets anywhere and everywhere. That idea informed this year's theme, "Bridging Worlds," according to Mr. Halley. But the worlds being bridged are as likely to be hyperlocal as international.

Library-press relations figure prominently on the program, for instance. So do technology and nuts-and-bolts production issues. The program also emphasizes "the university-press identity—how to establish and promote the work university presses do," Mr. Halley said. "How are we all adapting to and using this new communication landscape?" MOOCs and open-access textbooks are also on the program, although many university presses have not yet really grappled with what open access might mean for them.
As of Tuesday, about 760 people had registered for the conference, according to the association. That’s not far off the record set last year, when 787 people signed up.

New Leadership

This year's meeting marks a significant leadership change for the association, as its longtime executive director, Peter J. Givler, steps down. His successor, Peter M. Berkery Jr., most recently worked at Oxford University Press, where he served as vice president and publisher of the company's U.S. law division.

While Mr. Givler brought in-depth experience with university presses to the job, Mr. Berkery comes to it with strong legal and association expertise. He worked at the information-services and publishing company Wolters Kluwer for 11 years, specializing in securities and tax law, and has done legal and government-relations work for several groups, including the National Paint and Coatings Association and the National Society of Accountants, among others.

Mr. Berkery's familiarity with Washington may come in handy in the months ahead as the association confronts the implications of recent legal, legislative, and policy developments. Those include the decision in Kirtsaeng v. John Wiley & Sons, a copyright case in which the Supreme Court handed publishers a setback by ruling that books produced for foreign markets could be legally resold in the United States; a growing debate over copyright reform and the Obama administration's recent directive requiring expanded public access to federally financed research.

E-Book and Print Sales

Issues closer to home, like how sales have been this spring, will be on attendees' minds. Like other publishers, university presses consider sales data proprietary, but Mr. Berkery did share a couple of broad trends from the association's most recent survey of its members.

"Looking at our third-quarter report, with responses from about half our membership, overall sales have dropped by just a few percentage points compared to last year," he told The Chronicle by e-mail. "The smaller presses seem to be faring slightly better this year." And over the past four years, university presses' collective sales "have actually increased by an average of slightly over 5 percent," Mr. Berkery said.
That upward trend has been evident at Texas A&M University Press. "Two years ago we had a really dismal fiscal year," Charles Backus, the press's director, said in an interview. "But last year it turned around very nicely, and this year that trend, thus far, has continued."

Mr. Backus credits the turnaround in part to having some books make best-of-year lists. For instance, Continental Divide: Wildlife, People, and the Border Wall, by the photojournalist and environmentalist Krista Schlyer, has been a hit.

Such successes "obviously buoy us a bit," Mr. Backus said, but digital sales have also been strong. The press now works with at least a dozen e-book vendors, according to the director, and very recently signed a contract with Apple as well. "We just need to get our materials out there as much as possible in as many channels as possible," Mr. Backus said.

"I'm glad to say that our e-book investments and efforts seem to be paying off," he said. "The most striking thing to me is that e-book sales—which are just over 10 percent now of our net sales—do not seem to have hurt print sales thus far. That has been the happy combination that has led to good results on sales."

Mr. Backus does not take the relatively good times for granted. "We feel we're in a fairly stable situation right now," he said. "We know that that can change rapidly."

Untapped Potential

Not all presses have upbeat stories to bring to the annual meeting. "It's been a tough year for us and I think for many other presses that are medium size," said Marlie Wasserman, director of Rutgers University Press. E-book sales there have plateaued after doubling over the past four years or so, she said. As at Texas A&M's press, e-books constitute about 10 percent of net sales now, but "it's still not enough to make up for the dip in print sales," she said.

"The other thing that's on all of our minds now is enhanced e-books," she added. A lot of e-books are still just digital versions of print texts, "so we're not really taking advantage of the medium," Ms. Wasserman said.
Many university presses are wondering how to explore the untapped potential of digital books. "There's a lot of talk about this but not a lot of action," she said, laying out the challenges that face a press that wants to experiment with enhanced e-books. First it must find an author who wants to do such a project, then it has to figure out how to add images or video or other content without breaking the bank on permissions costs and staff time.

Doing a film book with clips from Disney movies would be impossible for Rutgers, for instance, "because we wouldn't be able to afford the permissions fees," Ms. Wasserman said.

Finding the right project for an enhanced e-book is one challenge. Finding a market for such work is another. "I'm not convinced of anything," she said. "But I feel that we need to experiment."

**Chunking and Micropayments**

Another hot topic right now—one that's percolated for the last year or two—is shorter-form publishing. Princeton University Press and Stanford University Press, among others, have been publishing books-in-brief that use either original content or cull chapters from longer works.

"Everyone is watching these too," Ms. Wasserman said, to find out whether there's a hunger for what she calls "this new genre—longer than an article, shorter than a book." To find out, the Rutgers press is commissioning new works that run about 30,000 words each; the first three books in that series should be out in about seven months, she said.

She also expects "chunking"—selling individual chapters of a book—to come up at the annual meeting. If publishers are able to sell small servings of content, she said, "that's going to be hugely beneficial to everyone."

Open access, however, makes her much more cautious. "I have seen no proof that open access stimulates book sales," Ms. Wasserman said. "I would be delighted to get micropayments for individual chapters. I'm just not delighted to give them away."
UM President Wolfe departs Providence Point

By The Associated Press
June 19, 2013 | 12:23 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — MU is about to hang a vacancy sign on its hilltop presidential home, Providence Point. UM System President Tim Wolfe said he plans to move out of the official residence overlooking Hinkson Creek and buy a private home. Since his December 2011 hiring, Wolfe’s wife and two children have spent most of their time in Massachusetts where the twins attend high school. His family has made weekend and summer visits to Columbia.

UM System spokesman John Fougere said Wolfe — a Columbia native whose father was an MU professor— is “putting down permanent, strong roots for his family in the community where he grew up.” Wolfe disclosed the pending move at the Board of Curators meeting in Columbia last week.

The nearly 13,000-square-foot home was built in 1971, with a residential addition completed 14 years later. Each of Wolfe’s eight predecessors has lived at the presidential home since it was built. But with plummeting state support of the university’s four campuses and near-annual tuition hikes, Wolfe is also likely mindful that some taxpayers may question continued public support of a private home.

Wolfe told The Associated Press he’s exploring ways to open Providence Point to the community, including as a possible party rental site. The university system spent $88,000 to fix the home soon after Wolfe’s arrival, with repairs including mold abatement, electrical upgrades and asbestos removal. He initially decided to leave Providence Point just a few months after starting work but changed his mind so the university would not have to pay for additional temporary housing.

Additional repairs are still needed. University officials previously said that Providence Point also needs work on its roof, windows, doors, siding and heating and cooling systems, as well as repaved parking and new carpet in the residential wing — repairs that in April 2012 were estimated to cost several hundred thousand dollars. Providence Point has four bedrooms, eight bathrooms, offices, an exercise room and an outdoor swimming pool.
WASHINGTON — Students applying for financial aid for the coming school year could find some comfort in a bipartisan student loan compromise taking shape in the Senate that would prevent interest rates from doubling and set a single rate each year for undergraduate students, rich or poor.

Interest rates, which would be tied to the financial markets, would rise slightly to 3.8 percent for low-income students receiving new subsidized Stafford loans this year but not double as they’re scheduled to do July 1. Despite the increase, the rate is still lower than the 6.8 percent students would face absent congressional action. The current rate is 3.4 percent.

More affluent undergraduates would see a bigger decline; the interest rate on new unsubsidized loans would drop from 6.8 percent to 3.8 percent under current market conditions.

Rates for all new federal student loans would vary from year to year, according to the financial markets. But once students received a loan, the interest rate would be set for the life of that year’s loan.

Rates for parents and graduate students also would be tied to the markets.

A draft of the proposal was obtained Wednesday by The Associated Press.

Congress is grappling with student loans for the second straight year, with each party pointing fingers at the other about who would shoulder the blame if rates double. The House passed legislation that also ties rates to the markets but the Senate earlier this month voted down two competing proposals.
The latest Senate compromise, developed during conversations among Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia, Republican Sen. Tom Coburn of Oklahoma and independent Sen. Angus King of Maine, was being passed among offices. None of them publicly committed to the plan until they heard back from the Congressional Budget Office about how much the proposal would cost.

A day earlier, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid told reporters negotiations were afoot and predicted a deal could be reached. He mentioned talking with Manchin and King, as well as Democratic Sens. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Jack Reed of Rhode Island.

"The last 24 hours, I've spent hours working with interested senators," Reid said Tuesday.

"We're not there yet," he added.

Education Secretary Arne Duncan and White House economic adviser Gene Sperling would have lunch with senators Thursday, Reid said.

Republicans, meanwhile, have been unrelenting in their criticism of Democrats for opposing tenets of Obama's student loan proposal, chiefly rates that change every year to reflect the markets. Without action, Republicans said, students were left not knowing how much they would be paying for classes this fall.

"It's not fair to these students and not fair to students across the country who need to know what the cost of their loans is going to be and what the interest rate is going to be," Republican House Speaker John Boehner told reporters.

Last year, Congress voted to keep interest rates on subsidized Stafford student loans at 3.4 percent for another year during a heated presidential campaign. Without the attention, education advocates worried that the interest rate would revert back to former rates on July 1, leading to extra out-of-pocket costs for students.

Six sometimes overlapping versions of student loan legislation were being considered in the House and Senate. Two bills — Senate Republicans' and Senate Democrats' proposals — both failed to win 60 votes needed to advance last week, seeming to suggest student loans were going to double.

Other proposals had champions among wings of their parties but only the House had passed student loan legislation that ties interest rates to Treasury notes. That bill drew a veto threat from the White House.
"The House has done its job. It's time for the Senate to do theirs," Boehner said.

It seemed work was afoot behind the scenes.

The bipartisan Senate proposal being circulated with just days to spare before interest rates increased borrowed pieces from the various suggestions.

In the potential compromise, interest rates would be linked to 10-year Treasury notes, plus an added percentage — just like Obama's proposal, as well as those from House and Senate Republicans.

When students sign for loans each academic year, their interest rate would be locked in for the life of that year's loan. For instance, students could wind up paying a higher interest rate for their sophomore year than their freshman year if the economy continues to improve and 10-year Treasury rates increase.

Students from lower-income families are eligible for subsidized Stafford loans, in which the government covers interest costs while they are in college. Those loans make up about a quarter of all federal student lending.

At the end of their studies, students could consolidate their loans, as is the case now. The current system caps that rate at 8.25 percent and lawmakers were considering keeping that in place.
Senior Focus: Is there a robot in your future?

SENIOR FOCUS • Dr. John Morley, St. Louis University

Those of you who saw last year’s movie “Robot & Frank,” which was set in the near future, have an inkling that as we age we are increasingly likely to have robots or other technological devices help care for us.

The future is now in Holland, where scientists have developed a CompanionAble robot that can live in your home with you. It does cognitive training, reminds you to take your medications, tells you that you forgot to shut the refrigerator door, allows you to Skype with your friends and relatives and calls for help in emergencies.

Robotic devices already being used in rehabilitation include intelligent walkers and treadmills that allow stroke patients to walk without assistance.

In Japan, Riba, a robotic bear developed by Toyota, helps assist in transferring patients from a bed to a chair. Researchers have created a prototype of an assistive robot that can autonomously perform bed baths for patients. “The Spoon” is an automatic feeding machine that can feed sushi and other foods to paralyzed patients.

At St. Louis University we showed that older people often find Aibo, a robotic dog, just as much fun as a real pet.

Technology is being put to good use at Tiger Place, an independent living environment created by the nursing department at the University of Missouri. To allow older people who need help to obtain it in a less intrusive manner, they created an integrated sensor network. Motion sensors can record whether a resident is using the toilet, if there is a problem with their blood pressure, pulse or respiration or if they have fallen. This system allows the resident to maintain independence, and feel confident that help will be rapidly available if needed.

Most of us should prepare to spend the last few years of our life surrounded by robotic devices. We are truly entering a brave new world.

SLUCare physician John Morley is director of geriatrics at St. Louis University and a geriatrician at St. Louis University and Des Peres hospitals. Email him at morley@slu.edu.
Kenneth MacLeod, a geology professor at the University of Missouri, notes: "The K-T event is the most catastrophic event to occur on earth over the last 500 million years." Sixty-six million years ago, a meteor about the size of Manhattan Island collided with the Earth in the Gulf of Mexico, forming a crater more than 110 miles across. MacLeod explains: "The approximate speed of the meteor was nearly 25,000 miles per hour, or 10 times faster than a speeding bullet. After the impact, the earth would have rung like a bell, and every living thing could have felt the collision. Dust and soot clouded the atmosphere, blocking the sun, trapping heat and causing acid rain." Plants and algae, the basis of food chains, would struggle to carry out photosynthesis with so little sunlight reaching the Earth.

MacLeod describes research into the K-T event as "a detective story of cause and effect." He explains: "The event was so large that it disrupted life by wiping out primary productivity, or photosynthesis, for so long that food chains collapsed from the bottom up as plants died." The K-T event is thought to have caused the extinction of all non-avian dinosaurs. On a broader scale, approximately 75 percent of all species on Earth disappeared after the K-T event.

MacLeod suggests that we should not worry about an event of this magnitude occurring in our lifetime and indicates that minor collisions with our atmosphere, like those causing "shooting stars," are common, but major impact events of the scale of the K-T occur rarely, only once in 100 million years.
JEFFERSON CITY (AP) — Weeks before a Chinese conglomerate agreed to buy Smithfield Foods Inc. in the largest such takeover of a U.S. business, Missouri lawmakers quietly approved legislation removing a ban on foreign ownership of agricultural land.

Lifting ban brings clarity, sponsor says.

Wednesday, June 19, 2013 at 2:00 pm

The northern Missouri legislator whose amendments to a pair of larger bills helped push the plan through the General Assembly and onto the desk of Gov. Jay Nixon said he wants to provide greater oversight of foreign ownership, which will be capped in Missouri at 1 percent and require state approval. The changes were approved on the final day of the legislative session.

"The law doesn't work," said Rep. Casey Guernsey, R-Bethany, citing legal loopholes that allow foreign owners to mask their assets behind domestic-based groups. "What I want to do is make it work. ... It will provide a degree of accountability for an international corporation that it wouldn't have before."

Shuanghui International Holdings Ltd. announced its plans to purchase Smithfield Foods on May 29 in a deal that still requires shareholder approval and a federal regulatory review by the U.S. Committee on Foreign Investment. The deal's expected value is $7.1 billion, including debt.

Missouri is one of several Midwest states with little-known laws passed in the 1970s amid concerns over Japanese investment that prohibit or restrict foreign farmland ownership. Smithfield Foods' spokeswoman Keira Lombardo said the two sides "identified this issue during their discussions, and it presents no obstacles to closing the proposed combination."

"Smithfield's operations do not fall under the provisions of many of the states ... and only a few of them have applicable laws that need to be satisfied," she said. "We intend to consult and work closely with appropriate state officials on this matter as appropriate after the closing."

In Oklahoma, the law limiting foreign farmland ownership exempts swine operations, said Diane Clay, an Attorney General's Office spokeswoman. And in Iowa, the office of Attorney General
Tom Miller said it expects Smithfield Foods' new owner to "comply with all" laws and "agreements," including a consent decree related to livestock production by meatpackers.

"We hope to close the loop soon, whether it's a final letter from Smithfield to us or a memo of understanding from our office to Smithfield," said Geoff Greenwood, a Mille spokesman.

The Missouri bill awaits Nixon's approval, and his office declined to say whether he would sign it. The offices of Attorney General Chris Koster and the state Department of Agriculture also declined to comment.

A Columbia-based group that opposes corporate consolidation in the agriculture industry criticized Guernsey's handling of the legislation. Language removing the foreign ban was added to two Senate bills in late April while in the House Agribusiness Committee, which is chaired by Guernsey. The underlying bills to which the amendments were added deal with farm loans and University of Missouri Extension districts.

In early May, Guernsey added an amendment while the bill was on the House floor that doubled the allowable foreign farmland ownership from half a percent to 1 percent.

"To call it a coincidence is doing a disservice to the democratic process," said Tim Gibbons of the Missouri Rural Crisis Center, referring to the legislative votes that preceded the Smithfield sale announcement and the absence of broader debate. "These things should have been discussed. And they weren't."

Guernsey, a dairy and beef cattle farmer, countered that he introduced a similar bill in May 2012. He bristled at suggestions that the foreign ownership ban was lifted at the request of Smithfield, which he said is the largest employer in his five-county district and a campaign contributor of Guernsey's.

"I didn't even know about Smithfield until we were out of session," he said. "Trust me, the last person Smithfield tells about any of their business decisions is Casey Guernsey."

© 2013 Columbia Daily Tribune. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Posted in Business, Wire on Wednesday, June 19, 2013 2:00 pm.