

University Press Committee
Minutes of Meeting of June 8, 2007
Convened at 9:30 a.m. in Room 905-09, Campus Center

Attending the meeting were chair McFarland, members Bromell, Fong, Goodenough, Jones, Paradiso, Sims, and Wise, director Wilcox, and editor Dougan. Copies of thirteen recently published titles were on display. The minutes of the meeting of February 9, 2007, were approved.

Wilcox reported that eleven months into the fiscal year, sales were very close to the pace of the previous year and that the Press was on track to publish 36 titles in 53 editions by the end of FY07, with net sales of roughly \$920,000. By rigorously controlling expenses and working hard to secure subsidies on a title-by-title basis, the Press staff expected to end the fiscal year with a small operating surplus in its fund balance.

Wilcox cited several key financial indicators from the latest statistical survey of the Association of American University Presses:

In our peer group, which consists of 24 presses with annual sales of up to \$1.5 million, the average figure for sales/employee is \$98,000. Our figure is \$123,000.

Similarly, for titles published per employee, the average for our peer group is 4.2, and the average for all university presses is 3.4. Our figure is 4.9 titles/employee.

Our inventory ratio—the value of inventory as a percentage of annual net sales—is 20%, which is much better than the average of 52% (which means we are not overprinting and sitting on a lot of unsalable books).

Perhaps most significantly, our level of total “parent institution financial support” is half the average for our group. One consequence of this lower level of support is that we can’t afford to spend as much as our peers on marketing and advertising. But we do our best to compensate in other ways—generating attention for our books through reviews and other less expensive forms of publicity and promotion. All in all, the AAUP statistics reveal a lean and efficient organization.

UMass Press books continue to win awards. In March, Cathy Stanton’s *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City* was selected as winner of the 2007 Book Award of the National Council on Public History. The award goes to the best work published about or growing out of public history. The selection committee commended Stanton for making “an outstanding contribution in the subfield of public history and memory.” The award was presented on April 13 at the NCPH Presidential Luncheon in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

In May it was announced that Marla Miller’s *The Needle’s Eye: Women and Work in the Age of Revolution* had won the 2007 Millia Davenport Publication Award sponsored by the Costume Society of America for the best book in the field. According to award committee chair Kristina Haugland of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the jury had “a particularly strong group of nine short-listed books representing many aspects of dress scholarship.” The jury commended Miller for her “integrative approach . . . weaving an engaging story that challenges much of what was previously believed about clothing production in eighteenth-century New England.” The award, which includes a \$500 honorarium, was announced at the Costume Society’s Annual Symposium in San Diego on May 30. Miller has been invited to speak at the Annual Symposium next year in New Orleans.

In March the Press mounted a book display at the annual meeting of the Association of Writers and Writing Programs in Atlanta, which drew 5,000 people. The table was staffed by Lisa Olstein, who directs the Juniper Initiative in the English Department. In April two Juniper Prize winners, Dwight Yates and Allan Peterson, came to Amherst for the Juniper Literary Festival and read their work before an appreciative crowd at the Amherst Cinema Center.

At the end of March, Dougan traveled to the Organization of American Historians meeting in Minneapolis, along with series editor Chris Appy. They met with prospective authors, recruited manuscripts, and went out to dinner with author Ed Martini.

Following the “News from the Press,” the committee spent some time discussing the proposed changes in the UMass administration and leadership, and how and to what extent those changes might affect the Press.

Turning to the manuscripts on the agenda, the committee considered seven projects—two series and five manuscripts. Although projects are usually presented in alphabetical order by author, with series proposals considered first, in this case a different order was followed to accommodate two members who had to leave early. All seven projects were eventually approved.

First up was Susan Zieger’s *Addiction and Metaphor in Nineteenth-Century British and American Literature and Culture*. The committee discussed this project at length, concluding that the author needs to clarify or restrict her argument at the outset and then follow through with it consistently. She also needs to devise a title that reflects the book’s thesis effectively. The project was approved with the understanding that the author will revise her work in consultation with the Press editors.

The second manuscript discussed was Larry Smith’s *The Emblems of Youth: Cesare Pavese and America*. One member observed that in the field of American studies “transnational projects” are particularly hot and the author would do well to tease out that aspect of his work and perhaps solicit blurbs from the likes of Frank Lentricchia. Given the length of the manuscript, the committee also suggested that cuts be made wherever possible.

In the case of Jed Deppman’s *A Dickinson for Our Time*, the committee commended the author’s combination of philosophical and historical perspectives and his response to the readers’ reports. One member cautioned that he should make sure to give adequate credit to other scholars who have looked at Dickinson from a philosophical vantage point, such as Sharon Cameron.

The committee then turned to the proposal for a series of books to be edited by Marla Miller under the title “Public History in Historical Perspective.” Noting that this series would build on the reputation and strength of the Public History Program on this campus, that the proposal had been endorsed by seven prominent scholars, and that Miller is considered “a rising star in the field,” the committee supported the plan. There was some discussion of how the parameters of the series would be defined and why some museums and historical sites were flourishing while others were not.

In considering the idea of distributing a series of publications for the Warring States Project entitled “Ancient China in Context,” the committee was impressed by the extensive documentation provided, including strong letters of support from twelve scholars in the field. Based at UMass Amherst, the Warring States Project represents a systematic effort to study classical Chinese writings in their historical contexts and to create a new chronology for those texts. One member noted that this research “cracked open a subject that has been frozen for years.” Although some of the findings of the Warring States Project might prove controversial, the committee had no hesitation about approving a distribution arrangement.

Next up was Elizabeth DeWolfe's edition of *The Narratives of Mary and Joseph Dyer*, which presents dueling first-person accounts by a nineteenth-century Shaker woman and her ex-husband, revealing their opposing views of marriage, family life, and Shakerism. The committee responded favorably to this project, but urged DeWolfe to come up with a snappier main title (one suggestion: "*At Each Other's Throats: The Narratives of . . .*").

The last project discussed was Steven Rosswurm's *The FBI and the Catholic Church, 1935–1962*, which had been originally conceived as a "trade book" aimed at a general audience. The committee noted that the author recognizes the need to cut the length of the manuscript and appreciates the cogent advice provided by the outside readers. The project was approved with the understanding that a revised draft would be sent to one of the outsider readers for a final review. One member of the committee, expressing strong interest in the subject, urged the Press to "get the book out sooner rather than later."

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:47 a.m. No date was set for the next meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Bruce Wilcox
Secretary

cc: Faculty Senate office