

University Press Committee
Summary of Organization and Procedures
(updated May 2010)

1. The University of Massachusetts Press was founded in 1963 as the book-publishing arm of the University. Its mission is to support and enhance the University's position as a major research institution by publishing significant works of scholarship, as well as books of more general interest for a wider readership. The offices of the Press are located in the East Experiment Station. There is also a satellite office at UMass Boston, staffed by an editor whose salary is funded by UMass Boston. That office, which was closed for several years, reopened in July 2009.
2. For administrative, financial, and personnel matters, the Press reports to the Vice Chancellor for Research & Engagement on the Amherst campus. Editorially, the Press reports to the University Press Committee, which is appointed by the Faculty Senate on the Amherst campus. The bylaws of the Faculty Senate currently read as follow:

“The University Press Committee shall: (a) control the imprint of the Press and approve all of its publications; (b) recommend policies concerning the administration and operation of the Press; and (c) recommend policies concerning the funding of Press activities.

Its membership shall be:

- (a) eleven Faculty Members or Librarians from the Amherst campus, selected at large;
 - (b) one full-time Faculty Member from the Boston campus, chosen by the Provost;
 - (c) the Provost or a designee, serving ex officio;
 - (d) the Vice Chancellor for Research and Engagement or a designee, serving ex officio;
 - (e) the University Editor, serving ex officio;
 - (f) the Director of the Press, serving ex officio; and
 - (g) the Secretary of the Faculty Senate or a designee, serving ex officio, non-voting.”
3. At the first meeting of the fall semester, the Press Committee elects a chair and a secretary (who records the minutes of the meetings). Meetings are scheduled by the director of the Press in consultation with the chair. Typically, the committee will meet three or four times during the course of the academic year. An agenda and briefing materials are mailed or made available electronically to all committee members at least one week in advance of each meeting. Any member wishing to add a topic for discussion at an upcoming meeting may do so by calling the chair or the Press director.
 4. Editorial review procedures:
 - (a) A preliminary in-house review of proposals and manuscripts is conducted by the editorial staff of the Press. Some of these projects are solicited by the editors and some arrive unsolicited. If the preliminary review indicates that the work would not be appropriate for the list, it is returned to the author. If the preliminary review indicates that it might be a good possibility, the editor invites submission of the complete manuscript. The editor may then choose to have it formally evaluated by one or more peer reviewers, who are asked to submit written reports responding to a standard set of questions. In selecting peer reviewers, the editor seeks scholars whose qualifications and expertise will enable them to render rigorous and well-informed judgments. Their names are not revealed to the author, unless they explicitly grant permission. When appropriate, either the complete report, excerpts, or paraphrases may be sent to the author by the editorial staff, whether or not the manuscript is to be considered by the Press Committee.

- (b) In addition to a reading by the director or one of the editors, manuscripts presented to the Press Committee ordinarily receive two outside readings. In some cases additional readings may be requested. All works by members of the University community require at least one reading by a reviewer not affiliated with the author's campus. Manuscripts recommended for publication by the Press editors are submitted to the Press Committee for approval. Ordinarily, the packet (which is confidential) includes a brief cover memo from the editor, the table of contents, at least two readers' reports and (if necessary) the author's response to those reports, and a few sample pages from the manuscript. The complete manuscript is also available, should a committee member wish to consult it. At the meeting, the committee discusses each project and votes on whether to approve publication. Sometimes a project is approved with the condition that particular revisions must be made prior to publication. Occasionally, a project is tabled pending further revision or receipt of an additional reader's report.
 - (c) When time is of the essence, and in commercially competitive situations, the Press editors may acquire rights to an English-language work published in the United States or abroad if the chair and the director agree the acquisition is appropriate. This procedure is designed to accommodate co-publication and distribution arrangements for volumes produced by museums, institutes, or small presses, as well as paperback reprint editions of titles from other publishers' lists. In each case, the acquisition is reported at the next meeting of the Press Committee.
 - (d) Proposals for series are presented to the committee with appropriate letters of support. Once a series has been established, each new volume selected by the series editors is submitted to the committee for approval. There are two exceptions to this rule: the Association of Writers & Writing Programs (AWP) Award Series in Short Fiction and the Juniper Prizes. The AWP winner is selected by a judge appointed in consultation with the AWP board, and the Juniper Prize winners in poetry and fiction are chosen by faculty in the English department's MFA program, to whom the Press Committee has delegated authority. All three prizes are awarded on an annual basis.
 - (e) The director may at his discretion sign advance contracts for promising projects and offer advance royalties. This procedure enables the Press editors to compete effectively with other university presses and to secure commitments from authors who might otherwise go elsewhere. Such contracts include a clause stipulating that final acceptance is contingent upon peer review and Press Committee approval. An advance contract in no way abrogates or diminishes the authority of the committee. It simply allows the Press editors to make a tentative, good-faith commitment in advance and thereby puts them on an equal footing with other university press editors.
 - (f) Upon acceptance of a manuscript by the Press Committee, a contract is offered (or, in the case of an advance contract, is made final). University regulations require that each contract be routed to the University attorney and then to the treasurer's office for approval and signature. Publication usually occurs within fourteen months of receipt of the final manuscript.
5. Hundreds of proposals and manuscripts are reviewed each year and only the most promising are brought before the Press Committee. As is the case at other university presses, only a small proportion of these are likely to be declined by the committee.

(A published survey of thirty university presses conducted by J. G. Goellner, director emeritus of Johns Hopkins University Press, found that editorial boards on average declined 1 to 3 percent of the projects presented to them.) Typically, the Press publishes 30 to 40 new books each year, including paperback editions of titles previously released in hardback. New titles are announced in semi-annual seasonal catalogs that are mailed to booksellers, librarians, and reviewers.

6. The Committee is not expected to pass judgment on the financial merits or market potential of individual manuscripts under review. Assessments and decisions of this kind are left to the Press director and staff, working within the constraints of their overall budget. They must make sure that the publishing program generates sufficient sales revenues each year to allow the Press to remain solvent.
7. Like most university presses, the Press has developed particular areas of editorial emphasis and strength. Good books attract good manuscripts, and it makes sense to concentrate in certain fields. In the current directory of the Association of American University Presses, the UMass Press editorial program is described as follows:

“Scholarly books and serious nonfiction, with special interests in American studies; American history; African American studies; Native American studies; architecture and landscape design; environmental studies; urban studies; history of the book; journalism and media studies; science and technology studies; gender studies; and books of regional interest.”

The Press editors have sought out interdisciplinary work in the belief that the most creative scholarly contributions often cut across traditional academic boundaries. They have also looked for manuscripts that will carry the results of scholarly research to a wider audience and thereby help to bridge the gaps between the academic community and the society as a whole. As the editorial program continues to evolve, members of the Press Committee are encouraged to suggest new areas of editorial development, to act as scouts, and to help the editors recruit promising manuscripts.

8. The Press director confers regularly with the chair on editorial and administrative matters and reports at each committee meeting on significant developments. The editors also report on conferences attended and editorial initiatives undertaken. Each year, the chair submits an annual report to the Faculty Senate summarizing the activities of the committee over the past year.