

**ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
UNIVERSITY PRESS COMMITTEE
FOR
FISCAL YEAR 2020**

**PRESENTED AT THE
801ST REGULAR MEETING OF THE FACULTY SENATE
JANUARY 28, 2021**

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

James Smethurst, Co-Chair

Joel Wolfe, Co-Chair

Briankle Chang

James Kelly

Barbara Krauthamer

Albert Lloret

Patrick Mensah

Mazen Naous

TreaAndrea Russworm

Samuel Redman

Sari Edelstein (UMass Boston)

Mary Dougherty (ex officio)

Summary

Like many units across the university, UMass Press faced a number of challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are happy to report that overall the Press has fared well during these difficult times. The Press Committee has smoothly transitioned to meeting with the staff via Zoom and has continued to meet on its regular schedule.

In Fiscal Year 2020, the Committee welcomed new members and saw some longstanding members step down. New members include Patrick Mensah, TreaAndrea Russworm, and Sari Edelstein (the UMass Boston representative). We would like to thank Kenneth S. Rothwell, Jr. (UMass Boston) for his valuable service to the committee.

Well before the coronavirus pandemic upended the spring semester of 2020, UMass Press was exploring an overhaul of its operational infrastructure, including print book distribution, short run printing, website functionality, e-commerce, and security, and the press-wide project management and records database. These systems had not been evaluated and updated in over fifteen years. To begin the process, the Press hosted an external review in October 2019 and issued a formal Request for Proposals in January 2020. In order to synchronize any changes with the beginning of FY 2021 and with the Press's busy season for book sales, the original goal was to have the upgrades in place by July 1, 2020. Despite the pandemic, the Press staff worked with vendors to install and go live with most of these upgrades, and as of July 1, the Chicago Distribution Center, an affiliate of the University of Chicago Press, has been distributing UMass Press titles.

Once the pandemic hit, the Press staff transitioned seamlessly to the requirements of remote working and remains off-campus for AY 2021. Due to the staff's skill and dedication, book production has not flagged. For FY 2020, the Press published and distributed 46 titles. Revenues decreased in the first months of the pandemic and in the final quarter of the fiscal year. The Press ended the year with sales 18% below the previous year and at 10% less than forecasted. The Press was able to cover the shortfall from its reserved revenue.

Activities of the Press Committee

Over the course of the academic year, the Press Committee met four times to approve specific projects and review the Press's editorial program. The Committee began the year by electing new co-chairs, James Smethurst, from the W. E. B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies, and Joel Wolfe, from the Department of History. The first three meetings of the year took place in person, and the final meeting in May was remote. In all, the staff presented 34 projects, including the five winners of the Juniper Literary Prizes. The Committee approved all projects unanimously.

For the Press's external review in October, Press Director Dougherty invited the directors of the University of Georgia Press, the University of Michigan Press, and New York University Press to Amherst for a site visit, and the Press staff provided the reviewers with extensive background materials prior to the guests' arrival. During their visit, the external reviewers met with each department of the Press as well as with Vice Chancellor Mike Malone. Additionally, the visiting directors met over lunch with members of the Press Committee. The Press Committee co-chairs spoke with the visitors and were pleased to hear from the outside reviewers that the UMass Press continues to be so highly thought of among the leaders of other university presses.

Over the course of the year's routine editorial meetings, Editor in Chief Matt Becker and Senior Editor Brian Halley presented diverse and compelling projects. The editors remain focused on American Studies, broadly construed, and they are developing lists in education, the history of medicine and public health, activism, and the history of race and politics in New England. Further, after having launched a number of new scholarly series over the last few years, the acquisitions team concentrated on new projects for the recently launched series. Halley presented manuscripts for two new series, namely African American Intellectual History and Page and Screen, a series focused on the adaptability, durability, and political force of books in a digital age. Similarly, Becker presented two titles that add to the growing collection of work in the series, *Childhoods: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Children and Youth*. Overall, the new series sustain the Press's efforts to heighten its editorial prestige, and the total number of series now stands at fifteen, a number that aligns more closely with the numbers of series maintained by comparable and aspirational presses. Series edited by talented scholars are key to establishing the Press as a top choice for prospective authors, and in its esteemed and long-running series, the Press competes quite effectively against much larger scholarly presses.

Typically, each meeting begins with reports from Press staff about new developments and updates on conference and campus travel. In March, when conference travel abruptly ended, the editors reimaged their means of reaching out to prospective authors. Becker and Halley combed through virtual conference programs, departmental rosters, and scholarly journals to prospect for new projects, and they conducted interviews via Zoom and telephone. The committee was glad to see that Becker and Halley quickly adapted to the pandemic's circumstances and made sure that cancelations and confusion did not negatively affect their ability to acquire new titles.

Courtney Andree, Marketing and Sales Director, also had to rethink how to publicize books virtually, whether through online exhibit halls or through digital advertising. While fall meetings in 2019 had been business as usual, the entire spring season, including the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians and the National Council on Public History, had to be reimaged as virtual marketing events. Andree worked closely with conference organizers to keep the Press visible within the constraints of the pandemic. The National Council on Public History and C. 19, the bi-annual conference for 19th century Americanists, were very collaborative and helped Press staff to participate in extremely successful virtual events. Further, the Press increased its use of digital advertising. Digital advertising in *The Nation* was particularly successful. UMass Press

placed an advertisement for *Black Lives, Native Lands, White Worlds: A History of Slavery in New England*, and the click through rate was so high that *The Nation's* staff has taken to using the ad as an example for other potential advertisers. In order to keep UMP visible in the absence of conferences, Andree also placed ads in a number of scholarly journals, among them the *Journal of African American History*, the e-newsletter for the National Women's Studies Association, and the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association online program..

In order to prepare for the discussion of manuscripts at each meeting, members of the Press Committee routinely review 200 to 300 pages of supporting materials, which describe and assess the manuscripts under consideration and document the process of peer review. The Committee discusses each project thoroughly, evaluating the scholarly merit of the proposed publications. In making each of its decisions, the Committee took into consideration the recommendations of the Acquisitions Editors and the Series Editors, the written reports of at least two scholars in the field, and the author's reply to those reports. Committee members frequently offered comments for the authors. The Committee votes to approve each project so that the Press can proceed to publication.

For FY 2020, Dougherty reported that the Acquisitions Editors had rejected 89% of projects they considered, including those that are unsolicited, brought to their attention by Series Editors, or sought out by the Editors themselves. This rate of selectivity indicates how carefully the Editors consider each project they present, and the Press Committee commended the Editors for the work they do in assessing projects and presenting strong candidates. In determining projects to be brought before the Committee, the Editors evaluate each project in terms of quality, audience, financial viability, and suitability for the Press's publishing program. In recent years, the Press has sustained its longstanding focus on American Studies and pursued new subject areas as they emerge within scholarship. In addition to the new series approved in the last two years, the Editors continue to pursue titles in targeted fields, among them memory studies, Jewish Studies, music, transcendentalism, the transnational dimensions of American Studies, and historically grounded literary studies.

Press staff also contributed to the scholarly communication community beyond campus. As service to the Association of University Presses, Halley co-chaired the Association's Equity, Justice and Inclusion Committee. Halley was instrumental in the AUP's June 2020 publication of a "Statement on Equity and Anti-Racism." For a second year, Dougherty was a member of the Association's Admissions and Standards Committee, the group responsible for vetting applications from presses that wish to join the Association.

Becker, Halley, and Dougherty also offered support to UMass faculty as they pursued publication of their research. On the Amherst campus, Dougherty and Becker worked with TEFDI to organize and host a panel on called *Demystifying the Process: Publishing your First Book*. Held on March 9th, the event was productive and very well attended. In collaboration with the Office of Faculty Development, Halley hosted his annual Publishing Workshop for UMass Boston via Zoom. Halley, Becker and Dougherty routinely advise

UMass Amherst and Boston faculty on questions related to book proposals, publishing contracts, and related matters.

Press Finances

Twice each year, Dougherty reports to the Committee on the Press's finances. The pandemic's shutdowns and disruptions certainly affected the Press's net book revenue. Throughout the year, Dougherty worked closely with the staff in the office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Engagement to monitor revenue flow and to prepare for a potential deficit. Dougherty also conferred with university press colleagues across the country, some of whom were anticipating shortfalls of up to 50%. In the end, the Press did see a shortfall in sales revenue, with net sales coming in 10% short of forecasted budget of \$705,000. The final quarter of the fiscal year was particularly hard hit as the pandemic closed some stores and stalled book orders. Subvention support evaporated entirely at the close of the fiscal year as the shortfalls of the pandemic impacted departments and research funds. The Press staff took a number of measures to contain expenses, but at the close of the fiscal year, the Press carried a deficit of \$90,000. The Press's reserve funds covered this amount for operating expenses, and the Press retains a reserve of just over \$75,000 separate from operating expenses. The Committee is very glad to see that support from both the Boston and Amherst campuses remains strong at just over \$463,000, or 40% of the annual budget.

Publicity, Awards, and Honors

The Press's accolades and awards provided a bright spot in an otherwise challenging year. The Press launched its regional trade imprint, Bright Leaf Books in 2016, and the imprint is now well regarded and well respected throughout the region. In September 2019, the Press published Jared Ross Hardesty's *Black Lives, Native Lands, White Worlds: A History of Slavery in New England*. The title has been featured at numerous invited talks, profiled in many media outlets, including WBUR of Boston, and received widespread praise, not least in the *Boston Globe* and *New England Quarterly*. The *Portland Press Herald* commended the book as a "meticulously researched history that turns on its head the notion that New England was beyond reproach with respect to slavery." In all, three Bright Leaf titles came out in FY 2020, and they were broadly reviewed and warmly praised. A donor has presented the Press with an annual gift to support publication of Bright Leaf titles, and has provided \$10,000 for each of three years. The imprint fulfills one aspect of the Press's mission, namely to share the vigor and diversity of the University's intellectual life with the citizens of the Commonwealth and the region. The praise given to Bright Leaf titles is a gratifying indicator of the Press's success in its mission to help connect the university with the public.

The year was also an excellent one for the Press's scholarly books, which remain the heart of the Press's publishing program. The Press's scholarly books received prestigious awards:

- *The Small Shall Be Strong: A History of Lake Tahoe's Washoe Indians*, by Matthew S. Makley, was selected as a 2019 CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title, an honor given to 10% of the 6000 scholarly books reviewed annually by the American Library Association.
- Mike Conway's *Contested Ground: The Tunnel and the Struggle Over Television News in Cold War America* won the 2020 Broadcast Historian Award from the Library of American Broadcasting Foundation and the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication selected the title as a finalist for the Tankard Book Award.
- A Tagus Press title, *Poems in Absentia and Poems from the Island and the World*, by Pedro Da Silveira and translated by George Monteiro, was longlisted for the 2019 PEN Award for Poetry in Translation.
- Selwyn Cudjoe's *The Slave Master of Trinidad: William Hardin Burnley and the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World* was longlisted for the 2019 One Caribbean Media Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature.
- Aimee Edmondson's *In Sullivan's Shadow: The Use and Abuse of Libel Law during the Long Civil Rights Struggle* was a finalist for the Frank Luther Mott Award, the Kappa Tau Alpha Journalism and Mass Communication Research Award.
- For calendar year 2020, CHOICE selected four UMass Press titles for its highest honor, Outstanding Academic Title. The honorees were: *Contested Ground: The Tunnel and the Struggle over Television News in Cold War America*; *In Sullivan's Shadow: The Use and Abuse of Libel Law during the Long Civil Rights Movement*; *Prophets, Publicists and Parasites: Antebellum Print Culture and the Rise of the Critic and Getting Out: Youth Gangs, Violence, and Positive Change*.

In addition to these national prizes, many titles received distinctions and honors. Among them:

- *World Literature Today* included two Tagus titles, *Eden-Brazil* and *Poems in Absentia and Poems from the Island and the World* in their list of 75 Notable Translations of 2019.
- The Boston Public Library included two UMass Press titles in its list of the Top Ten Boston Books of the 2010's. The honorees were *People Before Highways: Boston Activists, Urban Planners, and a New Movement for City Making* and *A People's History of the New Boston*.
- *The Memory Eaters*, the inaugural winner of the Juniper Prize in Creative Non-Fiction, received wide coverage and BuzzFeed featured the book in their round up "21 Great Books from Small Presses to Read Now."
- *Senseless Women*, the Juniper Prize Winner for the Short Story, was named a "Book of the Week" in *Publishers Weekly*, where it also received a starred review.
- *Constructing the Outbreak: Epidemics in Media and Collective Memory* proved to be timely and extremely well regarded and the author had a featured piece on the topic in the *Zocalo/Public Square*.

In addition to these honors and accolades, Press titles were reviewed favorably in a diverse group of academic journals, newsletters, and society papers, including: the *New England Quarterly*, *Journal of American History*, *American Historical Review*, *American Literary History*, *American Literature*, *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, *Native American and Indigenous Studies*, *Ethnohistory*, *Jewish Historical Studies*, *Journalism History*, *the Journal of Black in Higher Education*, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, *Early American Literature*, *Legacy*, *the European Journal of American Studies*, and *the Journal of American Culture*. *CHOICE*, the review vehicle for the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), recommended a total of twelve Press titles to its constituents. Taken together, these complimentary notices indicate how well the Press fulfills its core mission of publishing scholarship that reflects the quality of the University's intellectual life and research output.

Supporting Student Success and Career Development

Prior to campus closure, the Press hosted two interns in the production department. The Press also hired a work-study student as an office assistant for academic year 2019-2020, and they are delighted that he has stayed on for the current academic year. As a computer science major, the office assistant has been indispensable, especially with the Press's transition to a new database.

In fall 2019, the Press hosted their first Isenberg M.B.A. student intern. The student completed a project focused on measuring the financial contribution of individual titles.

As he has in previous years, Halley works with a graduate assistant, whose funding is provided by the English Department at UMass Boston. The student is gaining publishing experience as he completes a Master's degree.

Background

Founded in 1963, the University of Massachusetts Press seeks to enhance the University's stature as a top-tier research institution by publishing outstanding works of peer-reviewed scholarship. The staff also provides advice to faculty and graduate students on a wide range of publishing questions. Since its inception, the Press has sold over 2 million individual volumes. Today, it has more than 1,000 titles in print. Eight employees, along with student interns and outside sales representatives, produce and market 40 to 50 new titles annually. The main offices of the Press are located on the Amherst campus, and a satellite office is located at the University of Massachusetts Boston, staffed by an editor whose salary is funded by that campus.

For administrative, financial, and personnel matters, the Press reports to the Vice Chancellor for Research and Engagement at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Editorially, it reports to the University Press Committee, which includes a faculty representative from UMass Boston.

The Press has developed a number of partnerships to assist with marketing and distribution. Its sales representatives include the Columbia Consortium (for bookstores in the continental United States), the Eurospan Group (United Kingdom and Europe, Latin America, Asia, the Pacific, and Hawaii). Warehousing and order fulfillment functions are handled on a contract basis by the Chicago Distribution Center, an affiliate of the University of Chicago Press.

In an effort to make its books widely available digitally, the Press distributes its e-books to libraries and individual readers. Digital copies of UMass Press books are available to library patrons through JSTOR, EBSCO, ProQuest, and Project MUSE, and the Press's e-books are available for individuals to purchase through Amazon and Apple Books.