

**THE SCHOLARLY REVIEW PROCESS AT THE  
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS**

by

Deborah Cooper

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## Approval

Name Deborah Cooper  
Degree Master of Publishing  
Title of Project The Scholarly Review Process at the  
University of Toronto Press

## Examining Committee

---

Professor Rowland Lorimer  
Senior Supervisor  
Director  
Master of Publishing Program  
Simon Fraser University

---

Professor Valerie Frith  
Supervisor  
Assistant Professor  
Master of Publishing Program  
Simon Fraser University

---

Suzanne Rancourt  
Senior Humanities Editor  
University of Toronto Press  
10 St. Mary Street  
Toronto, ON

Date Approved \_\_\_\_\_

## **Abstract**

This report discusses the purpose of scholarly review and examines how the components of the process provide scholarly presses with a dependable system by which to select and develop manuscripts for publication.

After examining scholarly review in a general sense, this report addresses the review process in detail as it occurs at the University of Toronto Press. The University of Toronto Press is the largest scholarly publisher in Canada and publishes in the social sciences and humanities disciplines.

This report identifies safeguards that university presses integrate into the scholarly review process to ensure that the process consistently produces high-quality books. Two rounds of interviews were conducted to collect the data in this report. First, five University of Toronto Press editors were interviewed between July and August of 2002. The second set of interviews included four UTP authors as well as the Programme Manager of the Aid to Scholarly Publications Programme (funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada) and occurred in January of 2003. Information from these conversations was then integrated with what I learned during my internship at the press, as well as with research from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences (CFHSS) Web site, the *Journal of Scholarly Publishing*, books about publishing with a scholarly press, the Manuscript Review Committee's terms of reference, and a memorandum from a University of Toronto vice-president about the role of the university's faculty publication board.

This project report concludes by discussing issues that compromise the success of scholarly review and by proposing possible solutions to these problems.

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## **Introduction**

This project report discusses the scholarly review process and details how, in the summer of 2002, the University of Toronto Press used this process to ensure the publication of sound scholarship.

The vast majority of university presses with scholarly publishing programs practise scholarly review. This process helps university presses select and develop high-quality, innovative scholarship for dissemination to the academic community. There are three components of the scholarly review process: manuscript acquisition, peer review and faculty publication board review. While a manuscript undergoes scholarly review, an editor is responsible for securing funding for its publication. If the manuscript is eligible for an Aid to Scholarly Publications Programme grant, the body that distributes this subvention also takes part in the scholarly review process.

After studying the scholarly review process at the University of Toronto Press for the four-month duration of the Master of Publishing internship, I observed the effective aspects of scholarly review as well as its problems. This report gives an overview of scholarly review, discusses it in detail with regards to the University of Toronto Press, considers its efficacy and suggests possible improvements.

Two rounds of interviews were conducted to collect the information in this report. First, five University of Toronto Press editors were interviewed between July and August of 2002. All of the scholars interviewed answered the same list of closed and open-ended questions, which enabled them to share their own views and ideas on the scholarly review process. The second set of interviews occurred in January of 2003, and included four UTP authors as well as the Programme Manager of the Aid to Scholarly Publications Programme (funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada). The authors interviewed were published by UTP within a six-month period and were all asked the same questions about their publication experience at UTP and about scholarly review.

Information from these interviews was then integrated with my experience at the press and with research from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences (CFHSS) Web site, the *Journal of Scholarly Publishing*, books about publishing with a scholarly press, the Manuscript Review Committee's terms of reference, and a memorandum from a University of Toronto vice-president about the role of the university's faculty publication board.

## **Chapter 1:**

### **Scholarly review and university presses**

Robin Derricourt, Managing Director of the University of New South Wales Press, claims that the international scope of scholarly publishing has encouraged the emergence of “a common culture of academic publishing” throughout most English-speaking countries (including Canada, the United States, Britain, Australia, Ireland and New Zealand).<sup>1</sup> A key element of that common culture is scholarly review. This chapter describes the purposes of university presses, scholarly review as a quality-control system and some factors that influence a scholar’s selection of publisher.

#### **1.1 Purposes of university presses**

University presses have two purposes: the first is to fulfill their publishing mission and the second is to play their role in academe. Scholarly review ensures that university presses meet both of these objectives by helping presses publish high quality manuscripts.

In 1878 Daniel Coit Gilman, past-president of the University of California, stated: “It is one of the noblest duties of a university to advance knowledge, and to diffuse it not merely among those who can attend the daily lectures — but far and wide.”<sup>2</sup> Francis Sparshott, a University of Toronto professor emeritus, University of Toronto Press–published author and faculty publication board member, echoes this sentiment when he says that the primary function of university presses is to “produce records of the findings of research and instruments of instruction.”<sup>3</sup> Disseminating knowledge, then, is one purpose of university presses.

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<sup>1</sup> Robin Derricourt, *An Author’s Guide to Scholarly Publishing*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996) 6.

<sup>2</sup> Qtd. in Gene R. Hawes, *To Advance Knowledge: A Handbook on American University Press Publishing*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967) 53.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Sparshott, “Two-Faced at the Interface: Meditations on the Manuscript Review Committee,” *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* (July 2001), 195–6.

University presses aim to make accurate and innovative scholarship available to the public. The quality of the books that university presses publish establishes and upholds their reputations. The status of university presses is significant for two reasons: first, academic book buyers will not purchase books from presses that publish sloppily compiled manuscripts containing inaccurate content, and secondly, academics, who provide scholarly publishers with product, prefer not to submit their manuscripts to second-rate publishers.

Scholarly publishing, both in journals and in books, is important to academics, who must publish widely before their employing universities will consider them for tenure. Blaise Cronin, Dean and Rudy Professor of Information Science at Indiana University, identifies university presses as “an integral part of the academic reward system.” Publication by a reputable scholarly press legitimates the “scholarly credential and academic insight” of scholars and through this legitimization, scholars are awarded professional advancement.<sup>4</sup> Universities depend on scholarly presses to regulate their academic compensation systems just as scholarly presses depend on universities to generate publishable scholarship.

### **1.1.1 Choosing a scholarly press: A scholar's options**

Academics publish to share their knowledge with a scholarly audience and to advance their careers. They consider both of these goals before they decide where to submit their manuscripts.

Scholars want to publish with a press that specializes in their field. Authors seek out these scholarly publishers because their established networks in certain disciplines help scholars to access the correct markets. By choosing a press carefully, scholars can ensure that the most appropriate and broadest audience sees their book.

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<sup>4</sup> Blaise Cronin, “Peer Review and the Stuff of Scholarship,” *Library Journal* (September 2001), 57.

To earn promotions, academics are well advised to publish with recognized houses that have established traditions of publishing notable scholarly works. Marcel Danesi, Professor of Semiotics and Communication Theory at the University of Toronto, asserts: “A book that appears bearing the copyright of a reputable university press on its cover is a virtual guarantee that the author will not perish, making tenure and/or promotion a *fait accompli*.”<sup>5</sup> It is, therefore, important that authors consider academic reputation when selecting a press to publish their manuscripts. Some scholars avoid submitting manuscripts to the university press associated with their place of employment because other academics might assume that this connection, and not the quality of the manuscript, is the reason for the manuscript’s publication.<sup>6</sup>

In some cases, commercial presses will show interest in scholarly manuscripts if the texts promise to appeal to a sizeable market. Throughout most of the twentieth century, commercial presses did not compete with scholarly presses because, as William Germano, Publishing Director at Routledge, states in *Getting It Published*, “a commercial publishing house, scholarly or not, is by definition in the book business in order to make a profit, and many projects that achieve a high standard of scholarly excellence will be unavailable to a commercial publisher for the simple reason that their market is too small.”<sup>7</sup> In the latter half of the century, however, commercial presses began to pursue scholarly books with trade appeal.<sup>8</sup> Scholars at the beginning of their careers are less likely to publish with trade houses because they need the reputation of a scholarly press to validate their

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<sup>5</sup> Marcel Danesi, “From the (Ivory) Tower to the (Cold) Shower: A Tongue-in-Cheek Comparison of Academic versus Commercial and Trade Publishing,” *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* (January 1999), 75.

<sup>6</sup> Sparshott 196.

<sup>7</sup> William Germano, *Getting It Published: A Guide for Scholars and Anyone Else Serious about Serious Books* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) 90.

<sup>8</sup> Albert N. Greco, “The General Reader Market for University Press Books in the United States, 1990–1999, with Projections for the Years 2000 through 2004,” *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* (January 2001), 61.

research and ideas; however, some authors, especially established scholars for whom “primacy through rapid publication” is more important than the “*imprimatur* of peer review,” can be tempted to publish with trade houses because they publish more quickly than scholarly publishers.<sup>9</sup> Commercial houses may also provide perks such as greater royalties and/or advances,<sup>10</sup> access to larger audiences, a less grueling publication process, special book promotions, simultaneous or guaranteed paperback publication<sup>11</sup> and permission to write in a “more fun” and “less stuffy” style than academic writing demands.<sup>12</sup>

Authors depend on the success of university presses’ publication lists to assess the presses’ strengths as potential publishers, and university presses cultivate these important lists by performing scholarly review.

## **1.2 Scholarly review**

Scholarly review is a quality-control system that helps the various groups it affects to achieve their greater purposes.

For university presses, scholarly review provides a reliable method of developing high-quality publication lists. The system protects the reputation of the presses by preventing publication of manuscripts until experts sanction them.

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<sup>9</sup> Kim Douglas qtd. in William Y. Arms, “Quality Control in Scholarly Publishing on the Web,” *Journal of Electronic Publishing* 8.1 (2002), [Accessed: 9 August 2002.] <<http://www.press.umich.edu/jep/08-01/arms.html>>.

<sup>10</sup> While some distinguished academics receive advances from scholarly presses, generally, academics do not receive “payment” as such from their scholarly publisher. Instead, their employing institution compensates them with promotions and wage increases.

<sup>11</sup> Jones, Barbara, “Changing Author Relationships and Competitive Strategies of University Publishers,” *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 31.1 (October 1999), 13.

<sup>12</sup> Ben Johnson, “Why Not Write for a Commercial Publication?” *Writing and Publishing for Academic Authors*, eds. Joseph, M. Monley and Todd Taylor. 2nd ed. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997) 197.

For academic institutions, scholarly review amounts to the evaluation of the academic calibre of professors. Universities trust that the scholars whose works survive the review process warrant professional promotion; therefore, scholarly review provides academic compensation boards with a way to determine the calibre of professors.

For government-sponsored funding agencies, scholarly review provides a systematic method of manuscript evaluation that determines whether or not manuscripts should receive a subsidy to defray the costs of publication.

For authors,<sup>13</sup> scholarly review provides security. The process ensures that a number of academic authorities examine their texts for inconsistencies, inaccurate data and unclearly communicated ideas. By catching these faults before publication, scholarly review protects the reputations of authors whose works may be seen by thousands of their colleagues.<sup>14</sup>

For readers, scholarly review provides a stamp of approval. This assurance is important for individual scholars who use the knowledge within books to formulate their own academic theories and for professors who must select course books for their students.

Chapter 2 describes how the scholarly review process works to help university presses publish high-quality booklists.

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<sup>13</sup> At any point hereafter, when I refer to a manuscript's "author" this could also refer to a scholar who edited a collection. When I speak of an "editor," unless otherwise specified, I am referring to a press employee.

<sup>14</sup> Derricourt 58.

## ***Chapter 2:***

### **Components of the scholarly review process**

The scholarly review process generally comprises three components: manuscript acquisition, peer review and faculty publication board review. Moreover, while scholarly review occurs, editors are responsible for securing funding for the publication of their manuscripts. This chapter discusses how these elements enable university presses to determine what manuscripts to acquire, how to improve these manuscripts and, finally, what manuscripts to publish.

#### ***2.1 Manuscript acquisition***

Acquisitions editors are the first reviewers in the scholarly review process responsible for shaping the booklists of university presses. As in commercial publishing houses, acquisitions editors at scholarly presses are responsible for obtaining manuscripts. To ascertain the merit and innovation of ideas in submitted manuscripts, editors may summarize their arguments to discipline specialists and ask these authorities for their opinions before pursuing the publication of the manuscripts. In some university presses, editors have formally designated academic “buddies” who advise them on specific manuscripts as well as alert them of ongoing, field-specific projects that may evolve into future manuscript acquisitions. This counseling relationship facilitates the review process.<sup>15</sup>

Acquisition decisions depend on a university press’s mandate, its history, the strengths of its parent institution, the interests of its region and the personal interests of its editors.<sup>16</sup> Once primary criteria are satisfied, other influencing factors include the quality of the content, writing style and insight of the manuscripts, as well as the likelihood that the manuscripts will elicit funding. The acquisitions of a university press are of varying quality: some are publishable when they arrive at the press and

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<sup>15</sup> Germano 81.

<sup>16</sup> Pascal 145–46.

some are too rough for publication but contain innovative ideas and can be molded into useful books.

Regardless of how much work needs to be done on a manuscript, university press acquisitions editors do not tend to act as substantive editors. Whereas in commercial presses editors work with authors to develop manuscripts, in scholarly presses, editors rely most heavily on experts external to the press for manuscript development.

## **2.2 Peer review**

Peer review contributes to manuscript development and informs editors of the overall quality of manuscript content. A peer review is a specialist evaluation meant to “struggle with arguments, pick nits, keep [the author] from looking like a fool (a disaster of one), and keep the publishing house from looking like a group of fools (a disaster of many).”<sup>17</sup> This review is the major difference between scholarly publishing and commercial publishing.

Editors at university presses, although knowledgeable of the disciplines for which they acquire, cannot possibly possess the vast and detailed expertise they would need to edit and analyze each of the manuscripts that they manage. The editorial responsibility of acquisitions editors is to “familiarize themselves with the content, organization, presentation, style, and intended audience of each new manuscript.”<sup>18</sup> The editor then uses this information to find appropriate peer reviewers for the text and to discuss manuscript-related issues with them. The peer reviewers provide the editor with an in-depth evaluation of the manuscript’s “intellectual soundness, its scholarly contribution, its competition, its audience, its marketability.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Germano 80.

<sup>18</sup> *Author Handbook*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press) 5.

<sup>19</sup> Germano 85–6.

Most university presses require evaluations from two peer reviewers to determine whether or not they should pursue the publication of a manuscript.

### ***2.2.1 Responsibilities of peer reviewers***

A university press requires that its peer reviewers produce a written report answering a standard list of questions thoroughly and honestly in a reasonable amount of time.

These questions are designed to evoke answers that inform the press of the accuracy, originality and pertinence of the manuscript to its field of study (i.e., does this manuscript have an audience?) or of how the manuscript could improve to make the text more accurate, helpful, readable and clear. Useful reports examine entire manuscripts with the same level of detailed, punctilious attention. That said, the quality of the reviews sometimes mirrors the quality of the manuscripts. Well-written manuscripts enthrall readers, helping them to maintain the same level of interest throughout a reading and review. Inconsistent, poorly thought-out manuscripts however do not hold the attention of reviewers, and as the concentration of the reviewers wane, so does the quality of their reports.

Peer reviewers must not be overly critical or excessively fawning in their reviews. Neither of these approaches produce reports that help authors improve their manuscripts. Disparaging reviewers often fail to direct the focus of authors to specific trouble spots in their manuscripts. Passive readers recommend manuscripts without careful, conscientious analysis, enabling infelicities to pass to the next stage of scholarly review without resolution. Although editors must actively avoid reviewers with overly critical and passive personality traits during peer-reviewer selection, Eleanor Harman, past Head of Editorial in Scholarly Publishing at the University of Toronto Press, believed that neither of these personalities is typical of academic reviewers. In 1961, she stated: “In our experience, academic men may be rude to their wives, beat their children and kick their dogs ... but they do maintain

their academic integrity” while reviewing the works of their colleagues.<sup>20</sup> Harman also shared the following quotation to demonstrate that readers rarely deliver unqualified praise. In an evaluation report, a reviewer wrote: “In my opinion, the author is working his way down a blind alley. But he is exploring it so interestingly and with such valuable insights that I think his work ought to be published.”<sup>21</sup> A good reader both coaches and judges<sup>22</sup>; evaluators must be prepared to recommend or oppose the publication of manuscripts.

### **2.2.2 The format of peer-review reports**

The structure of the written reports that peer reviewers produce depends on how university presses question their reviewers. Some university presses guide the comments of their reviewers with sheets of prewritten questions and checkbox answers; for example, they might ask “Were you satisfied/very satisfied/completely satisfied/not satisfied with the author’s prose style?”<sup>23</sup> Other presses ask a list of open-ended questions that permit peer reviewers to elaborate on their responses.

### **2.2.3 The ongoing peer-review cycle**

An editor will not likely advance a manuscript to the next stage of scholarly review if peer reviewers return unfavourable or middling reports. Instead, the editor may reject the manuscript or ask the author to revise the text according to the suggestions of the reviewers. If the latter action is pursued the editor will begin the peer-review process anew after the author revises the manuscript. Ideally, the editor will send the revised manuscript to the same peer reviewers who examined the first draft so that they can recognize the evolution of the manuscript and appreciate the adherence of the author to their advice. Editors prefer not to introduce different readers at the revision stage, because new reviewers raise additional issues of contention and fail to recognize manuscript development.

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<sup>20</sup> Qtd. in Hawes 66.

<sup>21</sup> Qtd. in Hawes 66.

<sup>22</sup> Germano 91.

<sup>23</sup> Germano 84.

If the second round of readers' reports also results in a lukewarm reaction, the editor may, again, stop pursuing the publication of the manuscript or may have the author revise the manuscript in preparation of a third set of reviews. If the editor believes in the manuscript strongly, this cycle continues until peer reviewers produce favourable reviews that recommend the publication of the manuscript.

#### ***2.2.4 Peer-reviewer identity confidentiality***

Individual motivations and prejudice can compromise the effectiveness of scholarly review; consequently, editors keep the identities of peer reviewers secret from authors to encourage honest reports. After peer review is complete, editors send authors a "blind copy" of the peer-reviewer's report, which disguises any features that may identify reviewers.

To ensure unbiased reviews, some universities use a two-way blind technique, in which authors are unaware of their peer reviewers' identities and peer reviewers are unaware of the authors'. This method is often impractical because, especially in small fields, scholars tend to know what research their colleagues are pursuing.

#### ***2.2.5 Author response to peer-review reports***

After an editor receives two peer-review reports, and prior to proceeding to the next stage of scholarly review, the editor sends the author the reports and the author must prepare a written response. An author response is important because it provides authors with the opportunity to demonstrate their seriousness about manuscript improvements to evaluators at the next stages of the process. An ideal author response is positive and tactfully worded. It considers the readers' responses seriously and respectfully informs the editors of which criticisms the author will heed to improve his manuscript and of which suggestions the author considers unfounded and unreasonable.

### **2.3 Faculty publication board**

The faculty publication board<sup>24</sup> of a university press is the “watchdog” of its imprint, meaning that it ensures that the press only publishes sound scholarship. Like peer reviewers, the board reviews manuscripts and offers suggestions to increase their suitability for publication. The members of the faculty publication board are senior scholars from the parent institution of the press. Many universities consider appointment to the faculty publication board prestigious.<sup>25</sup> Because of this, the nominated members tend to have tenure, actively pursue their own research and participate in the scholarly community in general. They are specialists in their fields and also have a breadth of knowledge, which enables them to read across disciplines. Unlike peer reviewers, members of faculty publication boards may not be experts in the fields of the manuscripts that they evaluate. In order to contribute to the development of a manuscript, members, ideally, have the following qualities: “... responsible judgment, long and successful experience of the academic world in general, an established position of trust and authority within the university, familiarity with established values and openness to appropriate novelty, personal experience of the problems of scholarly writing, and, collectively, knowledge of the prevailing practices and standards in the general research domains within which the press operates.”<sup>26</sup> The experience and wisdom of faculty publication board members augment the quality of the manuscripts that they review.

The role of this board varies from institution to institution. Sometimes the faculty publication board is integral to the scholarly review process of a press and the board must recommend the publication of a manuscript before the press can sign a contract with its author. These boards may have to approve the publication of a

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<sup>24</sup> Other names for the faculty publication board are the university press committee, press council and editorial board.

<sup>25</sup> Hawes 56.

<sup>26</sup> Sparshott 198.

manuscript unanimously or they may only require a majority vote.<sup>27</sup> Some university presses do not need parent institution approval for their publication decisions and can sign a contract with an author as soon as they unilaterally decides to publish a manuscript.

## **2.4 Funding**

Scholarly book publishing in Canada and in many other countries is not a financially viable business because the proceeds generated by the purchases of the scholarly-book market are too small to offset the costs incurred by the publication process. Despite their lack of monetary return, it is generally believed that scholarly texts should be published. In fact, publishers often explain the mission of scholarly publishers with reference to their credit-heavy balance sheets. Sparshott specifies that the mandate of a scholarly publisher is to publish academic research “wherever this cannot be done commercially,”<sup>28</sup> and Bill Harnum, vice-president of Scholarly Publishing at University of Toronto Press, claims that a “scholarly publisher’s true mission” is to “continue to publish good scholarly books until the money runs out.”<sup>29</sup> The inability of scholarly publishers to fully finance their scholarly publishing programs forces them to obtain external funding.

Three major challenges in recent years have forced university presses in Canada to pursue funding more actively. First, budget cuts to education, which places additional pressure on university presses to become self-sufficient, prevent universities from funding their scholarly presses as they did in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, libraries — a principal constituent of the market for scholarly books — also suffer from budget cuts, which decreases the number of scholarly

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<sup>27</sup> Pascal 148.

<sup>28</sup> Sparshott 195–6.

<sup>29</sup> Sparshott 185.

<sup>30</sup> Pascal 143 and John Lorinc, “Publish or Perish? It’s Not Easy Surviving as a Publisher of Scholarly Books in Canada Cross-country Profiles in University Presses,” *Quill & Quire* 60.11 (November 1994), 11.

titles they obtain per year and, therefore, decreases the annual revenue of university presses. Thirdly, scholarly presses now compete with commercial presses for manuscripts, which can mean that the presses must pay advances or royalties to acquire manuscripts, or that they cannot acquire manuscripts with trade appeal that could otherwise have subsidized their scholarly titles.<sup>31</sup>

Because these traditional methods of revenue generation have ceased to fund scholarly publication programs sufficiently, Canadian university presses must now pursue additional sources of internal and external funding.

#### **2.4.1 Internal sources of funding**

University presses may generate some of the money that they need to subsidize their scholarly publishing programs through more commercially successful publishing ventures. As course curricula expand to include classes in jazz, film studies, etc., the number of books with commercial appeal that seem suitable for scholarly lists also increases.<sup>32</sup>

The parent institutions of scholarly presses support the presses that use their names. This support might be a direct monetary subsidy or it might take another form. For example, the university might supply the press with rent-free quarters on campus, complimentary equipment and maintenance services, or low-interest financing.<sup>33</sup>

#### **2.4.2 External sources of funding**

University presses subsidize their publishing programs mainly through external resources. These resources derive from institutional and professional support, and from government subsidy programs. Authors may include the promise of a subsidy with their manuscript proposals or may get funding while their manuscript is under

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<sup>31</sup> Pascal 142.

<sup>32</sup> Pascal 142.

<sup>33</sup> Hawes 57 and Derricourt 208.

consideration by a press. Editors can apply for subsidies at any stage of the scholarly publication process.

Most university presses will not accept personal subsidies from authors because the contributions may cause the academic community to then question the legitimacy of the publication of the authors' manuscripts. In lieu of receiving money directly from authors, university presses save money by increasing the authors' production responsibilities. Generally, scholarly authors are responsible for financing illustration, photo and quotation permissions and must do their own indexing.<sup>34</sup> In instances where a book contains elaborate illustrations, tables or graphic components, presses may accept a monetary contribution from authors to offset (specifically) typesetting costs, colour plates or fold-out pages.<sup>35</sup> Another alternative to accepting private funding is to ask authors to secure a special sale. Often the sponsoring institution of an author's research may have access to new audiences who can receive these books without affecting the publishers' markets.<sup>36</sup> As can be seen, authors might incur some expense without actually handing university presses a monetary sum: a compromise that enables university presses to maintain the integrity of their acquisitions while receiving much-needed support.

### **Author-generated funding**

Scholarly authors are adept at finding funding for their manuscripts. They are familiar with the funding networks that pertain to their subjects because they have usually approached these organizations to request funding for their research. Author-generated financial backing often originates from nonprofit academic organizations or from the academic department of the author. University-departments typically have a portion of their budget allotted for the publication pursuits of their faculty members. The amount of money that scholarly presses

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<sup>34</sup> Jones 6 and Pascal 144.

<sup>35</sup> Derricourt 208.

<sup>36</sup> Derricourt 209.

receive from university department sources varies from department to department and from university to university.

### **Government grants**

The most common method of subsidizing a Canadian scholarly work is through government grants. The most popular grant for Canadian university presses that publish in the social sciences and humanities is the Aid to Scholarly Publications Programme (which is a chief subsidy source of the University of Toronto Press).

### **Aid to Scholarly Publications Program (ASPP)**

The ASPP is a subdivision of the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences (CFHSS). The CFHSS is an independent society of scholars composed of over sixty-five scholarly associations in the humanities and social science disciplines. The mandate of the CFHSS is to “promote teaching, research, and scholarship in the humanities and social sciences and a better understanding of the importance of such work for Canada and the world.”<sup>37</sup> In conjunction with other activities, the CFHSS administers the ASPP through funding that it receives from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The CFHSS Web site states that the ASPP “was established because scholarly books, although essential to the advancement of research in and about Canada, are not financially self-supporting, having limited specialist audiences and therefore short, unremunerative print-runs.”<sup>38</sup> The ASPP supports the publication of 145 books a year.

Three internal groups contribute to the ASPP. The ASPP secretariat, composed of four full-time employees (and one part-time) administer the program. The ASPP Management Board, composed of four senior scholars, is responsible for policy

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<sup>37</sup> Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences Web site, [Accessed: 16 August 2002.] <<http://www.hssfc.ca/english/abouthssfc/about-mandate.cfm>>. Note: When this site was first referenced, the federation was called the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada.

<sup>38</sup> Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences Web site, <<http://www.hssfc.ca/english/aspp/generalinfo.cfm>>.

development and manuscript adjudication. The ASP Committee, consisting of many discipline-specific subcommittees of two or three people, makes subvention decisions.

The voluntary members of the ASPP Management Board and the ASP Committee are scholars approached by the ASPP secretariat, which requests nominations from the heads of the many academic associations that belong to the CFHSS. Committee appointments are three years long and can be renewed once.

*The ASPP grant-giving process*

Kel Morin-Parsons, Programme Manager of the ASPP, considers the ASPP an “author’s program”<sup>39</sup> since the grants are awarded to manuscripts rather than publishers. The ASP Committee cannot award these grants indiscriminately because SHHRC only provides the program with a finite amount of money. The ASPP champions the transparency and objectivity of peer review, which it uses to distribute grants amongst funding candidates.<sup>40</sup>

To determine whether or not a manuscript will receive an ASPP grant, the ASPP secretariat performs a three-tiered evaluation. First, it determines if the manuscript is eligible for ASPP funding. Secondly, it arranges to receive two peer reviews. Thirdly, the ASP Committee, after it receives the manuscript’s dossier, two readers’ reports and the author’s response, decides whether or not the manuscript will receive an ASPP grant.

*Applying for an ASPP grant*

A manuscript’s author or a press considering the manuscript for publication can submit a manuscript to the ASPP. This process, from application to subvention

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<sup>39</sup> Kel Morin-Parsons, telephone interview, 22 January 2003.

<sup>40</sup> Kel Morin-Parsons, telephone interview, 22 January 2003.

receipt, commonly takes six to seven months.<sup>41</sup> The ASP Committee pays the grant only after an eligible Canadian publisher publishes the manuscript.

Scholarly presses applying for an ASPP subsidy must send the ASPP secretariat five copies of the ASPP registration form (for an example of this form, see Appendix 1) and five copies of the preliminary material of the manuscript (i.e., its table of contents, its preface, its introduction, and any accompanying endnotes for any preliminary text submitted by the author). This information enables the committee to establish the grant eligibility of a manuscript. A tentative production budget is shared at the meeting; the budget includes the book's promotion, typesetting, printing and binding costs. After the committee deems the manuscript eligible for a grant, a complete manuscript is sent to the committee for peer review.

#### *Manuscript eligibility*

For the ASPP secretariat to deem a manuscript eligible for a subvention (valued at a fixed amount of \$7 000), the text must be a "book-length" text (no less than one-hundred pages) of "advanced scholarship in the humanities and social sciences."<sup>42</sup> The author of the manuscript must be a Canadian citizen or landed immigrant, and a Canadian publisher recognized by the ASPP<sup>43</sup> must be considering the manuscript for publication. Occasionally, the ASPP secretariat, with the authorization of the ASPP Management Board, permits an exception to these requirements if the content of a manuscript is sufficiently Canadian, based on Canadian sources or contributes to Canadian scholarship.

Specific ASPP guidelines identify what types of manuscripts qualify for an ASPP subsidy. Generally, the following types of works are ineligible: unrevised theses;

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<sup>41</sup> ASPP, Aid to Scholarly Publications Programme (ASPP), Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences (CFHSS), Ottawa, May 2002: 9.

<sup>42</sup> Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences Web site, <<http://www.hssfc.ca/english/aspp/eligibilitycriteria.cfm>>.

<sup>43</sup> For a detailed list of Canadian publishers eligible for ASPP grants, see <<http://www.hssfc.ca/english/aspp/eligibilitypublisher.cfm>>.

previously published material; critical editions, bibliographies and reference works; memoirs and autobiographies; and translations of scholarly works.

#### *Peer review and the ASPP*

The ASP Committee evaluates manuscripts by assessing the reports of two peer reviewers. When dealing with a submission from an author or a small university press, the ASPP secretariat will find both peer reviewers. For larger publishers, in the summer of 2002, the ASPP secretariat generally found one peer reviewer and the university press selected the other. As of late 2002, an ASPP-pilot program authorized university presses belonging to the Association of Canadian University Presses (ACUP) to select both peer reviewers for ASPP-eligible manuscripts.

The ASPP secretariat selects its peer reviewers, from Canada or abroad, using the same methods that university presses use to choose their reviewers. It consults the appropriate subdivision of the ASP Committee and asks them to recommend an appropriate scholar in the manuscript's field. After the ASPP finds a scholar who can review the manuscript in six to eight weeks, the ASPP secretariat provides the peer reviewer with a list of questions to consider while reviewing the report. For a list of these questions, see Appendix 2.

The ASPP does not offer peer reviewers financial compensation. Instead, the program relies on academics' sense of scholarly service. Morin-Parsons claims that this sense of duty causes most scholars to return their peer reviews punctually.<sup>44</sup>

After two peer reviews are obtained, the ASPP waits for the author response to the readers' reports.

#### **Assigning grants**

Once the ASPP secretariat deems a manuscript eligible for a grant and receives all of the necessary information for a manuscript evaluation, it forwards the

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<sup>44</sup> Kel Morin-Parsons, telephone interview, 22 January 2003.

manuscript's preliminary information, readers' reports and author response to the appropriate ASP Committee so that this committee can determine if a manuscript should receive funding. The committee can decide to do one of five things. It can provide the manuscript a grant with or without conditions; it can give the manuscript a low-priority status, which means it will receive a grant if funds permit; it can request a revised version of the manuscript; it can defer making a decision until it receives a third reader's report; or, it can refuse to issue the manuscript a grant.

If the ASP Committee requests a revise and resubmit, the author must send the revised manuscript back to the committee with a list of the revisions that he made. To save time and resources, the ASP Committee allows an author to resubmit a manuscript only once.<sup>45</sup>

Manuscripts labelled "low-priority" gather until they reach a critical mass.<sup>46</sup> Then, the ASPP secretariat calls a meeting of the ASPP Management Board (a.k.a. the Adjudication Committee). This board compares the low-priority manuscripts and determines, by this comparison, which manuscripts are of higher quality and are more deserving of an ASPP grant. The ASPP Management Board meets virtually (through e-mail and faxes) four times a year.

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<sup>45</sup> Another clause that saves the committee time and resources is its refusal to allow authors to resubmit their manuscripts if the authors withdrew their manuscripts from the process before the committee decided on their funding eligibility; however, if a publisher is responsible for withdrawing a manuscript from the process, authors can continue the process in their own names.

<sup>46</sup> Kel Morin-Parsons, telephone interview, 22 January 2003

## ***Chapter 3:***

### **Scholarly review at the University of Toronto Press**

This chapter explains the components of the University of Toronto Press (UTP) scholarly review process and reveals how acquisitions editors, peer reviewers and a faculty publication board develop manuscripts to prepare them for publication. This chapter also references the funding venues of the UTP.

Scholarly review at the UTP can vary slightly from acquisition to acquisition because editors implement the process according to the individual circumstances of each manuscript. The following explanation of the process describes the procedure to which the editors most often adhere. Where important, this report mentions possible process variations.

#### ***3.1 University of Toronto Press***

The UTP is the largest scholarly publisher in Canada and publishes a total of 140 scholarly, reference and general-interest titles per year in the social sciences and humanities. The press encourages research and publication for the advancement and dissemination of knowledge. UTP was founded in 1901 to function as a printing supplier to the University of Toronto, but it now publishes, designs, manufactures, distributes and sells books, journals and reference books.

#### ***3.2 Acquisitions at the University of Toronto Press***

UTP believes that its role as a scholarly publisher is to disseminate knowledge to a wide audience. A UTP Presidential Committee Report from 1974 states:

The responsibility of the Press goes beyond the University community to the nation as a whole ... The University Press exists to publish scholarly books — careful, authoritative studies by writers trained in a major university discipline or disciplines ... publication of a scholarly work is an essential part of the

academic process since it is the principal way by which new knowledge is communicated to an international audience.<sup>47</sup>

Harnum further elaborates on UTP's mission by claiming that scholarly publishing is about making *all* scholarship available to the public not just *excellent* scholarship as some manuscripts "may not, in fact, make more than a small contribution to the scholarly edifice."<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, to maintain the trust and respect of the book-buying and book-selling scholarly community, UTP focuses on publishing manuscripts of accurate and innovative scholarship.

### **3.2.1 Target markets**

The target markets of UTP are scholars, libraries and students. The discriminating taste and limited capital of these markets cause UTP editors to acquire cautiously.

### **3.2.2 Acquiring manuscripts**

Editors at UTP consider manuscripts for publication at varying stages of preparedness; the manuscripts may be complete, partially complete or in proposal stage. UTP editors ask that authors submitting proposals include a letter explaining the manuscript's subject and intended audience, an outline, a partial bibliography, a sample chapter or two if possible and a *curriculum vitae*.

The press prefers that a manuscript not be under consideration by any other publisher while being reviewed by UTP. If an author has submitted his proposal to more than one publisher, UTP asks that the author alert the press of this fact. This will cause an editor to review the submission more quickly.

### **3.2.3 Manuscript criteria: What acquisitions editors look for**

The following six things affect whether or not acquisitions editors will pursue the publication of a manuscript:

- the fit of the manuscript with the established lists of UTP;

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<sup>47</sup> Qtd. in Marsh Jeanneret, *God and Mammon: Universities as Publishers*. (Toronto: MacMillan, 1989) 320.

<sup>48</sup> Harnum, 187.

- the quality of a manuscript (writing style and contribution to the current body of academic literature);
- an adequate market base;
- the reputation of the author;
- the timeliness of the content; and
- the possibility of funding.

UTP's currently published disciplines and series (see Appendix 3 for the complete lists) affect the future acquisitions of the press. If the press receives a proposal that does not fit into its list but which may justify branching out into a new field, the press discusses the possibility of expanding its list with its faculty publication board.

Acquisitions editors at UTP believe that experience enables them to differentiate publishable manuscripts from unpublishable manuscripts. First, an editor judges if the author writes the manuscript well. Secondly, an editor looks at the author's education, employment and publication background. Thirdly, an editor will examine the works that the author cites<sup>49</sup>; if the bibliography includes the major and recent works of scholarship on the subject of the manuscript, the editor concludes that the author is responsible and informed about the current issues of his discipline. Fourthly, a UTP editor reviews the manuscript to ascertain if it makes a significant contribution to the existing literature in its subject.

If editors are in doubt about the worth of a manuscript at this preliminary stage, they will query a respected scholar in the manuscript's field about the topic, credibility and potential academic influence of the text. UTP editors have informal relationships with scholars (in the faculty publication board and elsewhere) who satisfy this advisory role. In this way, editors ensure that they do not prematurely

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<sup>49</sup> Arms, <<http://www.press.umich.edu/jep/08-01/arms.html>>.

turn away a poorly prepared manuscript that has the potential to make a large academic impact.

Editors must also determine if the manuscript has a potential market. If the book fits easily into a UTP series or list and/or if a well-known author wrote the book, a market for the book is usually assured. If an editor is unsure of whether or not a market exists, she will consult an academic in that field for advice.

In addition to marketability, the reputation of authors may affect whether or not editors pursue the publication of manuscripts. Editors generally prefer to work with authors who are pleasant, punctual and realistic. Some authors submit manuscripts to UTP and insist on immediate publication because they are up for tenure review. Any authors who do not understand the time constraints of scholarly publishing may not be published at UTP because of the resources that they will demand from the editors who would deal with them. Likewise, authors who have demonstrated in the past that they are demanding, apt to miss delivery dates and difficult to work with may find it difficult to find an editor to represent their manuscript.

The timeliness of the content of a manuscript will also affect whether or not editors consider the text for publication. The pace of the scholarly review process can be inadequate for manuscripts that contain time-sensitive information. For example, the publishing process for medical-science research may sometimes sacrifice thorough review for quick publication, because the research must reach its public before it becomes outdated. Medieval and renaissance scholars however can take more time preparing and producing a book. Their long-term projects can have a lasting shelf life and are unlikely to suffer from competition because the academic market cannot sustain two books on the same topic. Because of this, the publishing schedule can be extended to allow more time for editing. The time-consuming nature of scholarly review has changed scholarly publications from the active

literature of a field to that of a historic record.<sup>50</sup> If scholars submit manuscripts that must be published quickly, UTP editors may recommend other venues for the publication of the manuscripts.

Funding is also a determining factor of whether or not editors pursue the publication of manuscripts. As a rule, UTP does not publish books unless they receive financial support.

### **3.2.4 *Where manuscripts come from***

Acquisitions editors at UTP obtain manuscripts in a variety of ways. They often receive unsolicited manuscripts because of their reputation for publishing in certain areas and because of the status and longevity of UTP. In addition, editors receive manuscripts from scholars whose manuscripts fit into a pre-established UTP series. All UTP department editors are responsible for examining unsolicited manuscripts that relate to the discipline in which they publish.

Editors also acquire manuscripts through personal meetings with academics. Most scholarly organizations and disciplines have associations that meet annually. UTP editors attend these conferences and discover the research projects of scholars through the lectures and word-of-mouth that occurs at these trade events (such as the MLA and the Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities). Further, editors learn about new research occurring in their fields via the authors that they publish who often mention the investigations of their colleagues.

As well as using these methods, editors read discipline-specific scholarly publications. For example, scholarly journals contain articles about field-specific, noteworthy topics and also contain book reviews that alert editors of what topics scholars are currently publishing with which presses. These book reviews reveal to editors whether or not the work of a particular scholar reviews well and, thus, if the

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<sup>50</sup> Arms, <<http://www.press.umich.edu/jep/08-01/arms.html>>.

scholar is worth pursuing for future publication. Likewise, editors also discover potential manuscripts by reading university newspapers such as the University of Toronto's faculty publication *The Bulletin*. By reading these papers, editors can discover recent developments within university faculties and learn about upcoming guest lecturers who may be working on manuscripts.

Yet another way that editors remain informed about their fields' recent topics of interest is through list-serves. Sometimes scholarly association sites host online discussion groups in which scholars discuss their projects, interests and research findings with their colleagues. Using such resources, editors are quickly alerted to the research pursuits of scholars in the fields in which they publish.

### **3.2.5 Manuscript development at the acquisition stage**

After editors have decided to pursue the publication of a manuscript, they must decide if the manuscript is ready for peer review or if it needs modification. UTP editors use their vast knowledge of scholarly books to request changes within the document, but, as they publish 20–25 of the 40–50 manuscripts that they manage yearly, they do not have time to read and substantively edit each of these manuscripts so they pass them to peer reviewers for more extensive analysis.

### **3.2.6 The Publishing Committee**

The Publishing Committee (PC) of UTP consists of the senior VP of Scholarly Publishing and the press's acquisitions editors, managing editorial department and senior marketing department. The committee meets once a week to discuss administrative matters and to evaluate the publishability of the manuscripts that acquisitions editors bring before it.

Acquisitions editors may present a manuscript to the PC at any stage of the scholarly publication process before copy editing. When they introduce a manuscript to the PC depends on external competition for the manuscript and the

enthusiasm of its readers' reports.<sup>51</sup> For example, if the readers' reports of a manuscript are positive and other presses are vying to acquire it, editors may decide to bring the manuscript before the PC early in the scholarly review process in order to receive permission to offer its author an advanced contract. Or, if editors believe strongly in a manuscript that the PC may oppose because of negative (and according to the editor, inaccurate) readers' reports or a costly production budget, editors may present the manuscript to the PC only after they have attempted to attain support from UTP's faculty publication board.

When editors bring manuscripts before the PC, they first circulate a completed, unsigned Decision To Publish (DTP) form. For an example of this form, see Appendix 4. The circulation of these forms and the corresponding budgets prior to the PC meeting gives meeting attendees the opportunity to review the document and contemplate any problems that UTP might have publishing the proposed manuscripts.

At the PC meeting, the editor acquaints the committee with the manuscript's topic, author and history (i.e., the prevailing sentiment of any returned readers' reports, an overview of any completed substantive manuscript modifications and an update on the funding status of the manuscript). Employees at the meeting begin discussions and the press makes use of the expertise of its staff to discuss the content of the manuscript. At these meetings UTP staff determines the manuscript's place on the UTP list, ascertains the financial viability of the project, considers the market of the manuscript and agrees on its extent, price and print volume. After discussion the senior VP takes a vote. If a majority vote opts for the publication of the manuscript, the DTP form is signed by the acquisitions editor who manages the manuscript, the senior VP of Scholarly Publishing and the Sales and Marketing manager, and the editor can offer the author a conditional contract. The signed DTP is contingent on faculty publication board approval and the receipt of funding. If a majority vote

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<sup>51</sup> UTP employees refer to the document that peer reviewers produce as a reader's report.

elects that UTP not publish the manuscript, the editor informs the author. The PC may also decide to set the manuscript aside until they receive an additional peer-review report or the judgment of its faculty publication board.

### **3.2.7 Contracts**

At UTP, the editor and author can negotiate a contract at any time after the PC has agreed to pursue the publication of a manuscript. The contract gives the press the right to publish the manuscript and to register the book's copyright in the press's name. The contract also clarifies the responsibilities of the press, author and editor, and specifies the deadlines and the format of the final submitted manuscript. Also recorded in this letter of agreement are the number of complimentary copies and the royalties that the author will receive. Two important clauses, included in all UTP contracts, state that the publication of the manuscript depends on faculty publication board approval and the receipt of funding (i.e., if additional funding is necessary to create a cost-effective budget for the manuscript). These provisions mean that a signed contract between UTP and an author does not guarantee the publication of the author's manuscript.

## **3.3 Peer review at the University of Toronto Press**

At UTP, peer review occurs, preferably, after an editor obtains a complete manuscript from an author. At this point, the editor finds at least two expert scholars to review the manuscript and asks them to produce a readers' reports.

### **3.3.1 Peer-reviewer selection**

The match between manuscript and peer reviewer is paramount to the successful execution of scholarly review because: "a good match yields an invaluable report. A poor match can waste precious time, or result in a book being declined for the wrong reasons."<sup>52</sup> The editor must consider a variety of factors when selecting a reviewer: the reviewer's academic expertise, relationship with the author and capacity to produce a prompt report.

In order to improve multiple aspects of a manuscript, UTP editors usually attempt to submit the manuscript to scholars who have differing specialties. For instance, one scholar may have practical experience of the subject and the other reviewer may have theoretical knowledge of the field or may be an expert on a topic in the manuscript that the editor feels the author discusses inadequately. By selecting peer reviewers of differing specialties, editors ensure that different aspects of the manuscript are reviewed carefully.

At UTP, editors keep the identities of peer reviewers confidential to ensure that reviews are not influenced by improper motivations; however, they do disclose the identity of authors. Before selecting reviewers, editors may ask authors for a list of potential peer reviewers, but editors are not obliged to contact any of these scholars.<sup>53</sup> Editors also ask authors who should *not* read their manuscript. Editors immediately dismiss some scholars from consideration. For example, if a manuscript is a revised dissertation, editors will not consider any scholar who sat on the advisory board of the project. Further, editors avoid contacting the immediate department colleagues of authors and, where possible, any professors from the same university. Editors also question potential reviewers about their connection with an author. If the reviewers are linked to them in any way, editors determine if the colleagues are capable of producing fair reports.

Germano defines a good reader as a “midcareer scholar actively engaged in his own work.”<sup>54</sup> He refers to the midcareer scholar because prominent academics are likely to be markedly busy, making them unsuitable reviewers because their schedules may either cause a process delay or force them to produce a rushed and, therefore, careless review.

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<sup>52</sup> Germano 82.

<sup>53</sup> This method also helps editors collect names of experts for future peer reviews.

<sup>54</sup> Germano 88.

### **3.3.2 Responsibilities of peer reviewers**

Peer reviewers for UTP have a responsibility to review manuscripts in a reasonable amount of time. Although the review period varies depending on the schedule of the reviewers, but UTP editors generally request that appraisers return manuscripts in six to eight weeks.

The readers' reports are structured according to UTP's *Guide to Appraisers* sheet. For an example of this document, see Appendix 5. The *Author's Handbook* that UTP produces also conveys this information. The handbook specifies:

Manuscript appraisers are asked to consider specific questions when assessing manuscripts: (1) What is the thesis of the work? Is the scholarship sound and up-to-date? Does the manuscript make a significant contribution to its field? (2) Is the presentation effective in terms of style and organization? (3) What is the primary audience of the work? To what extent is it likely to appeal to readers outside its main area of scholarship and to general readers? (4) What are the major books published on this subject? How does this work compare with them? (5) What revisions would you suggest? Do you recommend publication, with or without revisions?<sup>55</sup>

When the editors pass the *Guide to Appraisers* to peer reviewers, they may also include a list of manuscript-related questions of their own. Then, when the reviewers respond to these questions in their readers' reports, editors have managed to relay their concerns about the manuscript to the author through an experienced source.<sup>56</sup> This method enables editors to further improve the manuscript.

### **3.3.3 Author response to readers' reports**

UTP editors allow authors a month to prepare their responses to the reviewers' comments. They encourage their authors not to respond to readers' reports too quickly, as hastily written responses tend to be defensive and angry. Editors will work with their authors to massage the author responses until they feel that the replies are suitable for distribution to the external approval boards. Sometimes

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<sup>55</sup> Author Handbook 5–6.

<sup>56</sup> Germano 89.

editors, frustrated by the language of author responses, will edit the documents themselves so that the intentions of the authors, and not their emotional reactions, will be clear to the faculty publication board and ASP Committee.

### **3.4 The faculty publication board at the University of Toronto Press**

The faculty publication board at UTP is called the Manuscript Review Committee (MRC). This board, created in 1974, is integral to the publication process of UTP because the publication of all UTP books depends upon a recommendation from this committee. UTP has no jurisdiction over this body, which is governed by the University of Toronto. The University uses the committee to monitor the press with which it is associated.

#### **3.4.1 The Manuscript Review Committee**

Little official documentation on the processes of the MRC exists, but what UTP's faculty publication board lacks in written procedures it makes up for with tradition.<sup>57</sup>

The following section explains the MRC's mandate, composition and appointment processes.

#### **MRC responsibilities**

UTP and the University of Toronto consider the MRC the “guardian of the imprint.” Since the University of Toronto shares its name with UTP, the university has a stake in ensuring that the UTP imprint implies quality. The MRC monitors the press by performing the following responsibilities:

The Committee's terms of reference will be to review manuscripts submitted to the press in order to determine their acceptability or rejection on scholarly grounds, to

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<sup>57</sup> The single, informal *Terms of Reference* sheet that does exist seems inadequate considering the committee's importance in the UTP publishing system.

approve the editors and editorial committees of series of books<sup>58</sup> and of scholarly journals that are published by the Company, and to advise the Company's management from time to time on scholarly matters.<sup>59</sup>

In addition, the committee performs lobbying activities. For example, the MRC may write letters of concern or support to organizations such as the ASPP to request continued funding for scholarly publishing programs.

### **Selecting MRC members**

The president of the University of Toronto selects the members who compose the MRC from a list of nominations submitted by the MRC Chair.

### **What is the composition of the MRC board?**

The MRC is composed of “no fewer than ten scholars in appropriate fields” (where “appropriate fields” is defined by the subject matter of UTP's lists).<sup>60</sup> The number of committee members is dependent on the number of titles and the variety of the subjects that UTP publishes. As the annual output of the press has increased to 140 books per year, the number of MRC members has grown accordingly. As of the fall of 2002, fifteen members sat on the committee. When UTP starts a list in a new area of academia, the MRC may acquire an additional MRC member who has some knowledge in that field.

### **How are MRC members chosen?**

Turnover in the committee occurs rarely and, as a result, the university president tends to replace only one MRC member at a time. Often replacements occur only when a member retires or goes on sabbatical, in which case a one-year replacement is nominated for her seat. The MRC Chair may ask members leaving the committee to recommend their replacement.

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<sup>58</sup> Discussions about upcoming series at MRC meetings help editors to solicit information and advice about the series and gives the MRC notification of what sorts of manuscripts editors may submit to them in the future.

<sup>59</sup> Objectives and Requirements for Scholarly Publishing by the Company (Schedule “K”), University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1994.

<sup>60</sup> Objectives and Requirements.

Scholars appointed to the MRC serve a five-year term and after this specified time the president of the University of Toronto can renew their appointment.

Traditionally, MRC members serve on the committee for “life.”<sup>61</sup>

The president of the university officially names the Chair of the MRC, but the members of the committee usually select the appointee themselves. Typically, when the MRC Chair steps down, the Vice-Chair fills the Chair position. Like the other members, the Chair serves a five-year term, which is renewable at the discretion of the university president.

### **3.4.2 *The Manuscript Review Committee and scholarly review***

The following section explains the role of the MRC in scholarly review.

#### **Manuscript Review Committee meetings**

At MRC meetings, the MRC critiques manuscripts and gives UTP editors advice that will, when implemented, make the manuscripts more publishable. The MRC meets monthly during the academic year. In the summer, the group stops meeting because its members are on summer holidays. This pause in routine can prevent an editor from producing a book by a certain date. Editors can invoke what UTP editors casually label Summer Powers to continue the publication process. In this case, one member of the MRC reads the manuscript and communicates her opinions directly to the Chair (rather than the whole committee). In this manner, in the absence of regular meetings, publication proceeds at UTP.

#### **MRC meeting preparation**

Three weeks prior to a scheduled MRC meeting, the secretary of the committee (an editor at UTP) gives the MRC Chair a list of manuscripts available for review. The Chair issues each MRC member a manuscript according to her discipline. A UTP

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<sup>61</sup> In an editor’s fifteen-year UTP experience, only one MRC member left the committee prior to the completion of her five-year term. After four months, this scholar left the MRC due to the demands it made on her time.

editor can recommend that a specific MRC member read and review a particular manuscript, but the Chair is not obliged to abide by her proposal.

Editors are responsible for supplying each MRC member with a dossier that consists of the following:

- two readers' reports and a description of the identity of each reader<sup>62</sup>;
- an author response to the two readers' reports;
- an explanation of the history of the manuscript (i.e., an overview of any substantive manuscript modifications), and
- a complete manuscript for the committee member who is responsible for reporting on the manuscript to the MRC.<sup>63</sup> The MRC members have three weeks to read and review the dossier/manuscript.

### **MRC meeting attendees**

The monthly MRC meeting is attended by all MRC members, the president of UTP, the senior VP of Scholarly Publishing, the MRC secretary and any UTP acquisitions editor who manages a manuscript that the MRC is reviewing.

If an MRC member cannot attend an MRC meeting, he sends his manuscript report to the MRC secretary or the editor of the manuscript. At the meeting, the recipient

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<sup>62</sup> If the manuscript has undergone the peer-review process more than once, editors will include every readers' report in the dossier.

<sup>63</sup> It is essential that editors pursue peer review with complete manuscripts. At my first MRC meeting, I witnessed the adjudication of an incomplete manuscript. The manuscript was a compilation of essays, and the editor of the manuscript, frustrated with waiting for an unpunctual author, submitted the manuscript to peer review and subsequently to the MRC without receiving the contributor's essay. The essay arrived the night before the MRC meeting and the editor e-mailed it hurriedly to the MRC member reviewing the text. At the MRC meeting, the MRC reviewer read his original report (prepared before the editor passed him the last-minute essay) and declared that he thought the essay collection was haphazard, unbalanced and unpublishable; in fact, the reviewer stated that the manuscript seemed like a collection of unrelated lecture talks that were "just a lot of stuff" (MRC meeting, June 19, 2002). The MRC member concluded his prepared report by sharing that since the receipt of the last-minute essay, he had reconsidered his opinion. The member believed that the final essay of the manuscript brought coherence and clarity to the intentions of the manuscript's editors. Although the member's prepared report recommended against the publication of the manuscript, he concluded that the author revise and resubmit the manuscript. This example demonstrates why editors should commence the scholarly review process with complete manuscripts.

of the report reads it aloud, and discussion and judgment about the manuscript proceeds as usual.

### **Editors' role at the MRC meeting**

At the MRC meeting, the acquisitions editors, whose role in the publication process is instrumental until this point, are secondary to the MRC members. By the time of this meeting, if editors have performed their job correctly, the manuscript dossier should accurately reflect a manuscript's quality and, hence, the editors are present, not to debate with MRC members about the quality of a manuscript, but to gather advice about manuscript modifications to make the manuscript more saleable and useful to scholars.

### **A typical MRC meeting**

Although informal, a monthly MRC meeting progresses according to an established agenda. It begins with a report from the president of UTP. This short address may refer to the financial health of the company. While the MRC has no say over the budgets of the press, UTP shares the financial state of the company with them as a courtesy; since the MRC contributes to UTP's successes and failures, learning of the press's fiscal condition supplements a committee member's MRC experience. Following the president's report, the committee votes on the approval of the last meeting's minutes, which are circulated in advance.

The remainder of the meeting focuses on the evaluation of manuscripts that UTP is considering for publication. The Chair runs the meeting systematically and keeps members focused on the agenda. The Chair names a manuscript and then asks the manuscript's editor to share any recent developments with the committee before the appointed MRC member shares her report. If the editor comments now, she may mention the willingness of the author to implement the changes suggested by the peer reviewers or she may mention that UTP has secured grant money.<sup>64</sup> After this,

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<sup>64</sup> The financial situation of a manuscript should not influence the decision of the MRC — in fact, editors convey this information after MRC members have prepared their manuscript reviews, so the information has minimal influence over the MRC — but editors communicate the financial situation

the MRC reviewer delivers her assessment, summarizing the manuscript for the other MRC members and then discussing her opinion of it.

The style of the MRC assessments reflects the personalities of the reviewers. Some evaluations are written and read from carefully worded responses. Other reviewers speak off-the-cuff from memory or from rough notes written or typed beforehand. Some responses are brief, others lengthy. MRC members relay their opinions about the author's arguments, accuracy, sources, grammar, manuscript organization and length, and academic contribution. They refer to the strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript and suggest reasonable alterations that the author could make to improve his work. For example, at the June 2002 MRC meeting, one MRC member requested a restructuring of a manuscript, a subtitle that better described the content of the manuscript and an extended biography. Reviewers also disclose the components of the readers' reports with which they agree and disagree. The committee member finishes her detailed analysis by making one of three basic suggestions: she recommends the manuscript for publication, she recommends the manuscript for publication conditional on authorial revision (of the complete manuscript, of specific chapters or of a suggested addition) or she opposes the publication of the manuscript.

After the MRC reviewer completes the detailed analysis and imparts a publication recommendation, the Chair opens the floor to questions and discussion from other MRC members. Having received the manuscript's dossier, the remaining MRC members are prepared to discuss their concerns about the manuscript. The editor takes notes throughout this conversation about how the author can enhance the content and structure of his manuscript.

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of the manuscript in order to inform the MRC that a body external to UTP (usually the ASP Committee) supports the publication of the manuscript.

After the MRC has thoroughly discussed a manuscript, the Chair calls for a vote and asks if the MRC members are in favour of whatever recommendation the MRC reviewer has made. If the majority of the committee agrees with the recommendation, then the committee follows that proposal. In the case of a tie, discussion resumes until the committee reaches a final judgment.

MRC members may also choose to abstain from voting on a manuscript. Members might do this if their relationship with the author makes them a biased judge or if they feel unqualified to cast a vote due to a lack of knowledge about the subject of the manuscript. In these cases, MRC members' abstention from the voting process promotes fairness.

### **Recommending manuscripts for publication**

If the MRC recommends the manuscript for publication — and the PC has already signed a DTP form — the editor informs the author. The editor sends the author a contract if one has not been signed already.

### **Requesting that authors revise and resubmit manuscripts**

If the MRC recommends publication pending author alterations, the editor contacts the author and discovers if he is willing to accept the publication conditions. If the author is willing to make the alterations, the editor will prepare a schedule for the revisions. If the author rejects the suggestions of the MRC, then a process of negotiation commences. If an agreement cannot be reached between the author and the editor regarding which modifications will be made to the manuscript, UTP will not publish the manuscript.

If the alterations are extensive, an MRC committee member will read the revised manuscript, and the MRC process will be repeated. If the recommended revisions are minor, the MRC reviewer may recommend that the editor submit the revised manuscript to a subcommittee. This recommendation permits a single person to review the revised manuscript and comment on its publication status without

bringing the manuscript before the entire board again.<sup>65</sup> This member and the MRC Chair then decide on the suitability of the manuscript for publication.

No official threshold limits the number of times that an editor can bring a manuscript to the MRC at the “revise and resubmit” stage; however, perpetual resubmissions tax the time and resources of the MRC, the authors, and the editors; after a point, the editor is responsible for refusing to pursue the publication of an unimproved manuscript.

### **Rejecting the publication of manuscripts**

If the MRC turns down a manuscript, the editor sends the author detailed comments explaining why the MRC did not consider the manuscript of publishable quality.

If an author believes that the MRC has treated his manuscript unfairly or if he has a plan or explanation that he believes would change the decision of the MRC, an author may write a letter of complaint, which his editor will deliver to the Chair. The Chair then decides whether or not the manuscript should be re-evaluated. These events — an author writing a letter and the Chair reversing a decision — seldom occur (in part, because editors only inform irate rejected authors of this option).

### **Acquisitions editors’ influence over the MRC verdict**

UTP editors do have some influence over the final verdict of the MRC. If the committee chooses not to publish a manuscript, editors may ask if it is salvageable. The MRC may inform them of how the author could reconfigure the text to make it publishable. The extent to which editors question the MRC’s decision depends on the editors’ experiences with the manuscript’s author and their belief in that author’s manuscript. Through this exchange with the MRC, editors may be able to change a “not recommended for publication” decision to a “revise and resubmit”

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<sup>65</sup> The member who reads the revised manuscript is generally the same MRC member who first reviewed the manuscript.

verdict. This said, an editor must be ready to follow the advice of the MRC; at this stage, the quality of a manuscript should dictate its publishability, not its editor.

### **3.5 Funding at the University of Toronto Press**

In 1966, the University of Toronto decided that UTP should underwrite its scholarly publishing program from the profits of its trade books and printing services. Over time, the university noted the difficulties with this expectation and realized that the scholarly publishing program should not be constrained by “commercial responsibility.”<sup>66</sup> Despite this attitude change, UTP was left with the task of finding funds to support its scholarly publishing program. A percentage of this funding comes from the printing division of the press and the proceeds of the four University of Toronto bookstores, which UTP owns.

At UTP, the search for subsidies may occur at any stage of the scholarly review process, and publication is generally contingent on the receipt of funding. The press will make an exception to this rule if it feels that a manuscript must be made public or if it feels that a manuscript will recoup its publication costs through book sales.

For the most part, when UTP searches for a grant, it looks to the ASPP.<sup>67</sup> If the ASP Committee refuses to issue a manuscript a grant, the press has little recourse but to look for alternative funding. The press sometimes receives funding from associations such as the Osgoode Society, which supports the publication of books about Canadian legal history, and the Renaissance Society of America, which subsidizes projects in Renaissance studies. If manuscripts are not eligible for ASPP or academic society grants, editors approach their authors for information about funding networks pertaining to the subject of their manuscript.

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<sup>66</sup> Jeanneret 313.

<sup>67</sup> UTP, a member of ACUP, now finds two peer reviewers and submits these reports to the ASPP for assessment.

UTP management discourages acquisitions editors from spending much time researching potential avenues of financial support because UTP does not have the necessary resources or manpower to do so. As a result, the decision of the ASP Committee regarding which manuscripts to bestow grants upon does affect the publication decisions at UTP.

## ***Chapter 4:***

### **Preventing abuse of scholarly review**

Each component of scholarly review is meant to assist in the selection and development of high-quality manuscripts that make an original contribution to knowledge. There are both explicit and implicit protective measures that encourage the fulfillment of this goal at each stage of the scholarly review process. These safeguards are outlined below.

#### ***4.1 The process at the University of Toronto Press***

UTP's decision to publish is contingent on the participant opinions collected throughout the scholarly review process. This founding of publishing decisions on the estimations of a number of knowledgeable people — at least two expert reviewers, an MRC member, an acquisitions editor, UTP staff, the ASP Committee (if the manuscript is eligible for an ASPP grant) and the faculty publication board as a whole — ensures that the opinion of one individual does not dictate the publication lists of a university press.

#### ***4.2 The role of acquisitions editors***

The desire of editors to publish successful books, and thereby have successful careers, is an implicit control that causes acquisitions editors to perform their role in the scholarly review process conscientiously. Editors who exploit the process might encourage the publication of weak books, and the poor reviews and subsequent low sales of these books would reveal the editors' mediocre work. The objective of editors to contribute to the publication of important scholarship prevents them from manipulating the review process in a number of ways. For instance, it stops editors from choosing manuscripts according to personal inclination alone. Instead, they consult a diverse network of academics to discover the latest trends, projects and interests in the disciplines in which they publish, and then acquire according to what they learn. Further, editors refrain from using passive readers and from requesting readers' reports repeatedly until they procure favourable reviews because, if they did so, their manuscripts would not benefit from thorough

examinations. If editors were tempted to do the latter, the process is safeguarded by an explicit provision: UTP expects editors to include *all* acquired reports in the dossier that the ASP Committee and MRC receive. Dossiers containing many readers' reports would make these groups wary, which would encourage them to review the manuscripts carefully. The fact that reviewers whom the editor does not select also assess manuscripts is an additional explicit check to potentially manipulative editors.

The influence that editors have over the opinions of the MRC is also controlled by implicit and explicit factors. For instance, editors can propose sympathetic MRC reviewers for their manuscripts, but the remaining MRC members may not respect the review and recommendation of those chosen members. Another way in which the process limits the editors' sway over the MRC derives from the editors expected demeanor at MRC meetings: they are expected to listen without argument to the MRC's comments and final verdict, not to argue their manuscript's case.

### **4.3 The role of peer reviewers**

It is important that the peer-review portion of the scholarly review process is effective, because the opinions of peer reviewers directly influence the opinion of the MRC and the ASP Committee. Peer review is the most debated element of the scholarly review process,<sup>68</sup> in part, because the process engages individuals who are susceptible to irrelevant variables. A study<sup>69</sup> performed in the United States revealed that when reviewers appraised manuscripts by authors from universities with excellent reputations, the reviewers recommended publication, but reviewers who examined the same texts believing that the authors came from less renowned institutions generated less favourable assessments. Peer reviewers can erroneously influence scholarly review.

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<sup>68</sup> Pascal 147.

<sup>69</sup> Derricourt 56.

The opinions of peer reviewers are particularly influential, and this is problematic because these opinions may derive from personal preferences. This means that peer reviewers may oppose the publication of manuscripts solely because the ideas that the texts express run contrary to their own, not because the ideas are inaccurate or unoriginal. The judgments of peer reviewers have so much weight in the scholarly review process that some argue that the setup of scholarly review assumes that peer reviewers know more about the subject matter of manuscripts than the manuscripts' authors.<sup>70</sup> Safeguards built into the process aim to guard against the human shortcoming of personal bias. For example, the list of questions that the press provides encourages peer reviewers to curb the individuality of their responses. Moreover, if editors are skeptical about the accuracy of a reader's report, they can obtain subsequent reports for comparison. The second peer review and the MRC reviewer's report also balance the impact of a single peer review. In addition, to limit the clout of peer reviewers' comments, if scholars provide a good explanation for why they do not want to make certain peer-reviewer-requested changes, UTP does not insist on the revisions. Hence, the construction of the process ensures that the assessment of one peer reviewer cannot cause the rejection or approval of a manuscript.

Some peer reviewers review manuscripts solely to receive the esteem associated with being a reviewer and to include the review work on their *curriculum vitae*. These scholars may not do a thorough job of reviewing the manuscript because they are volunteering only for their personal gain. Other reviewers are guided by personal relationships. Editors shield manuscripts from unsuitable reviewers by carefully questioning authors. Also, as mentioned before, the process allows editors to obtain a report from another reviewer if a peer reviewer produces a seemingly undeserved,<sup>71</sup> negative or positive, review. The efficacy of this safeguard improves

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<sup>70</sup> Danesi 77.

<sup>71</sup> Reports may seem "undeserved" if the peer reviewers seem offended by what they have read, do not seem to "get" the manuscript, reveal that they have their own axe to grind, do not qualify their praise, ignore the questions they are asked, or phrase their negative comments as personal attacks.

as editors become experienced and develop relationships with peer reviewers who produce thorough, helpful, trustworthy and timely reports. The peer reviewers to whom editors return produce good peer reviews because they are motivated by scholarly intentions. According to Germano, peer reviewers volunteer to assess manuscripts for the following reasons:

- “They are deeply committed to their field, and to the development of young writers’ careers.
- They find reading unpublished manuscripts on subjects within their specialties a means of keeping abreast of new developments, and as a way of spotting new talent.
- They read for the modest earnings of the honoraria, or for the free books that a publisher may offer them in lieu of cash.”<sup>72</sup>

(The UTP honorarium is small: approximately \$100 depending on the size and schedule constraints of a manuscript. The reviewer also receives a copy of the book upon publication.)

UTP editors and the ASPP Programme Manager believe that peer reviewers usually prepare readers’ reports as their “academic pro bono work.”<sup>73</sup> Reviewers with this sense of scholarly responsibility aspire to help their colleagues and thus try to perform their task thoroughly.

#### **4.4 The role of the Aid to Scholarly Publications Programme**

Just as UTP’s decision to publish is affected by the opinions of several individuals and groups, the ASP Committee’s manuscript assessments are guided by the assessments of two peer reviewers and of ASP Committee members. Again, this dependence on more than one opinion ensures that the funding decision is not made unilaterally.

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<sup>72</sup> Germano 86.

<sup>73</sup> Germano 86.

#### **4.5 The role of the Manuscript Review Committee**

The MRC is the most powerful body in the scholarly review process because, in the normal case, its decision to publish or not publish is final. Whereas editors can replace the opinion of an unjust peer reviewer with another and may access an alternative funding source in the event of ASPP-funding refusal, if the MRC does not recommend the publication of a document, UTP cannot publish the manuscript.

When the MRC was created, the Advisory Board of the University of Toronto stated: “We do not see [the MRC] as limiting the activities of the director [of UTP], upon whose energy and reading of future developments the success of the Press must continue to depend. We see the director as occasionally taking action on specific projects in the full confidence that the [MRC] will give its approval ...”.<sup>74</sup> The MRC, then, is not meant to oppose the decisions of UTP staff. Instead, it is meant to set the standards to which the press aspires. Sparshott believes that the MRC is valuable because its very existence in the process forces editors to publish better manuscripts.

Like the actions of acquisitions editors, peer reviewers and the ASP Committee members, the actions of MRC members can compromise the integrity of scholarly review, and safeguards are in place to ensure that they do not abuse the process. Scholars gain prestige by participating on the faculty publication board, and membership enhances their resumes. It is possible, then, that scholars could participate on the MRC solely for personal gain while having no interest in contributing to scholarly publishing. For this reason, two reputable and knowledgeable people, the MRC Chair and the university president, are responsible for appointing effective, conscientious scholars to this board. Also, minimal extrinsic remuneration may dissuade otherwise uninterested scholars from serving on the MRC. Members receive no monetary payment; instead, the press invites participants to two free lunches per year and allows them to order five UTP books

free-of-charge annually. This small compensation is not significant enough to cause scholars who are not dedicated to scholarly publishing to participate on the committee.

It is generally believed that scholars participate in the MRC for the following reasons rather than due to the self-serving motivations above. They may join the MRC to contribute to their parent institution, to stay abreast of the latest developments and literature within their disciplines, to learn about a broad spectrum of subjects that help them professionally and interest them personally, to expand their breadth of knowledge, to take part in a creative process, to find out publication tips<sup>75</sup> or to meet new colleagues. These motivations suggest openness to new ideas and a desire to learn; members with such enthusiasm examine texts in keeping with a notion of scholarly responsibility and are unlikely to review manuscripts close-mindedly or carelessly.

Even enthusiastic MRC members can threaten the integrity of scholarly review if they believe their opinions are the most important in the process. This belief is problematic because the MRC scholars who review the manuscripts may not be experts in the subjects of the manuscripts that they review, and yet they have the final say in the texts' publication status. To safeguard against giving reviewers too much authority, many faculty publication boards consult only readers' reports and an author's response to guide their recommendations (like the ASP Committee). These boards do not read the manuscripts under consideration. In these faculty publication boards, the board "relies not on its knowledge of a particular manuscript but on its general acquaintance with the academic world, its familiarity with its own university as a functioning institution, its experience with dossiers and reviews ... and its knowledge of the methods and thought processes of the editorial staff" to

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<sup>74</sup> Jeanneret 321.

<sup>75</sup> The members witness what types of manuscripts appeal to editors and encounter the least amount of friction during review. This knowledge may facilitate the ability of an MRC member to publish personal scholarship.

deliver its recommendation.<sup>76</sup> In this manner, the presses prevent the faculty publication board members from equating the opinion of a single board member with those of the specialist peer reviewers. At UTP, one MRC member is assigned to read a manuscript under discussion. To safeguard against MRC members who would unduly affect the process, UTP does not encourage MRC members to act like experts. An MRC member assessing a manuscript in detail, if unsure as to whether or not to recommend a manuscript for publication, can ask another committee member to read and evaluate the manuscript. In addition, if MRC members feel unqualified to comment on the publishability of a manuscript, they can abstain from voting on that manuscript.

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<sup>76</sup> Sparshott 197.

## **Chapter 5:**

### **University of Toronto Press–published scholar experiences of peer review**

The following four scholars were selected from the Spring/Summer 2002 and Winter/Fall 2002/2003 catalogues of UTP. The scholars were chosen without the input of UTP staff to gather a sample that would provide frank and varied opinions of the process. These scholars were asked about their experience publishing with UTP<sup>77</sup> and about their opinions of scholarly review. All interviewees were asked the same list of questions. For this list of questions, see Appendix 6.

#### **5.1 Scholar experience 1**

The first person interviewed<sup>78</sup> is one of two editors of a collection of conference papers. The publication of her manuscript took two and a half years due to complications with a co-publishing deal. The UTP portion of the process occurred in nineteen months.

##### **Manuscript submission**

The editor submitted her manuscript to UTP for a variety of reasons: the subject of the text fit into an established UTP series, she worked with a publication affiliated with the press and she admired the press's reputation. She did not consider submitting the text to a commercial publisher because her subject was clearly academic.

##### **Manuscript acquisition**

This editor was not informed about the scholarly review process at the acquisitions phase. She relied on her knowledge as an editor in the publishing industry to understand what was happening to her manuscript.

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<sup>77</sup> Each of the authors produced his or her manuscript with a different UTP acquisitions editor.

<sup>78</sup> Author interview, Telephone interview, 27 January 2003.

## **Peer review**

The editor was happy with the speed at which she received the readers' reports from the press. Only three months elapsed between when she sent the manuscript to UTP and when she received the peer reviews.

This scholar felt that her peer reviewers were knowledgeable, fair and accurate in their assessments of the manuscript. In fact, she and her co-editor had been arguing about an aspect of their manuscript, and the peer reviewers commented on the concern, which helped the editors to solve the problem. The scholar's only complaint was that one of the peer reviewers seemed to stray from the point of peer review and wrote a twenty-six page single-spaced review that consisted mostly of an intellectual debate with the authors of some of the conference speeches. The manuscript did benefit, however, from receiving advice regarding essays that could be omitted, an additional bibliographic entry, the manuscript's overall structure, and stylistic and factual inaccuracies.

This scholar did not accept all of the requested revisions and after she explained in her author's report why she would not make certain changes, she was not asked to make those revisions.

## **Funding**

This book was first accepted for publication overseas. The editor of the manuscript then approached UTP and asked if it would co-publish the book. UTP agreed to this, conditional on MRC recommendation. The receipt of additional funding (i.e., an ASPP grant) was unnecessary because the planned co-publication would decrease UTP's production costs.

Before the UTP editor received the peer-review reports, the foreign publisher became frustrated with waiting for scholarly review and proceeded to typeset the manuscript. (In the country where the manuscript was first accepted, the document did not have to undergo scholarly review.) This foreign press decided that any

changes requested by UTP-selected peer reviewers could be implemented at the film stage. When the press learned that the revisions would be extensive, it decided to publish the manuscript without making the changes. UTP, having lost its subsidized production budget, withdrew from its agreement to publish the manuscript.

One of the manuscript's editors undertook a search for funding in Canada. She contacted her place of employment (a publication that deals with the same subject as the manuscript), and it provided her with a subvention that satisfied UTP; consequently, the press agreed again to publish the document. (The manuscript was not eligible for an ASPP grant because the ASPP does not fund conference papers, nor does it fund previously published works.)

### **MRC**

This scholar believes that the MRC is too slow, causing a bottleneck of manuscripts for review; five months elapsed between the time she had prepared an author's response and the time the MRC reviewed her manuscript.

The MRC did not ask the editor to perform any revisions.

### **Overall assessment of the publication process at UTP**

The editor had a few complaints about her experience at UTP. She was unaware of the status of her manuscript throughout the process. She called her editor "kind and helpful," but also states that he did not approach her of his own accord about her manuscript. Moreover, she believes that the press was inefficient in handling its end of the publication process. Nine months elapsed between the MRC's approval of her manuscript and the editor's receipt of page proofs. The editor attributes this lag to scholarly culture, which she claims does not rank efficiency as important. She has published with two other Canadian university presses and claims that their processes are comparably slow, and thus she does not feel that this problem is unique to UTP.

This editor recommends that the MRC be divided into two groups to stop incoming manuscripts from causing a bottleneck. She also suggests that the press employ more managing editors to improve the turnaround of copy-edited manuscripts. (At UTP, three editors in the managing editorial department are responsible for having manuscripts copy edited by out-of-house freelancers. These three employees also check the copy edits after the pages are returned to the press.)

### **Opinion of scholarly review**

This author supports scholarly review and believes that it improves manuscripts. She trusts that peer reviewers act conscientiously and carefully when preparing their reports. Even in the past, when a publisher rejected a manuscript edited by this scholar, the editor, although disappointed at the time, understood the press's refusal to publish it. She added that being an editor in the process, rather than an author, probably made accepting this criticism easier, because she could share the blame with other contributors.

### **The next time ...**

The next time this editor tries to have a document published, if the book has enough commercial appeal, she will approach a commercial press. She believes commercial presses provide the advantages of a speedy process, and better publicity and exposure in bookstores, leading to greater sales.

## **5.2 Scholar experience 2**

The second person interviewed<sup>79</sup> is an author of a monograph. The publication process took two years.

### **Manuscript submission**

The idea for this book was pursued because a former UTP editor, who had edited the last book this author worked on, encouraged the author to send a proposal to the press. The author developed a proposal, and friends — agents and employees in the

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<sup>79</sup> Author interview, Telephone interview, 27 January 2003.

publishing industry — informed this scholar that a commercial press might publish her book. After consideration, the author submitted the manuscript to UTP because of a desire to achieve “academic respectability”.

### **Manuscript acquisition**

This author submitted her work and, given that the editor who originally encouraged the work had left the press, was paired with a different editor.

### **Peer review**

This author feels that her peer reviewers were fair but that they only dealt with surface issues in her manuscript. She did not undertake all of the peer reviewers’ suggestions but thought that their comments improved her manuscript in minor ways.

### **Funding**

This book received an ASPP grant. Neither the author nor UTP editor searched for additional funding.

### **MRC**

This author’s peer-reviewed manuscript waited two months before MRC review.

The MRC did not request that the author perform any revisions; in fact, the UTP editor did not inform the author of any comments that the MRC made. After MRC review, the editor asked the author to return a revised manuscript, with the recommended changes implemented, to the press within a month.

### **Overall assessment of the publication process at UTP**

This author now says that her choice to select a university press over a commercial press was “foolish,” because she believes her book would have reached a wider audience if a commercial press had published it. One of her three complaints about her experience at UTP was that an American university press approached UTP requesting a co-publication deal and UTP did not accept it, because it wanted to

retain North American rights. This angers the author because she claims that UTP's American distribution channels are poor.

The second complaint that this author made was that she received no indication from any UTP employee that her book was read. This scholar expected a hands-on approach to publication and wanted a close relationship with her editor. She was disappointed that she did not take part in a personal process to develop her "best book possible."

The third issue that this author brought up was the press's "inefficiency". She felt that whenever she was responsible for advancing the process, she was given four weeks to complete the changes (i.e., four weeks to produce an author's response; four weeks to complete all revisions after MRC review; four weeks to check and return the copy edit; and four weeks to produce an index). Contrary to this, it took UTP more than five months to return page proofs to her after she had approved the copy edit of the document.

### **Opinion of scholarly review**

This author approves of scholarly review in theory but feels jaded and disappointed after her experience. She had anticipated a close relationship with an editor who would help her to shape her book; instead, she questions if her editor, the MRC or, to a lesser extent, her peer reviewers<sup>80</sup> actually read her book.

### **The next time ...**

This author claims that she is apprehensive about writing another book considering her UTP experience.

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<sup>80</sup> Since the ASPP and the MRC also recommended the publication of this manuscript, it is possible that the "vague" readers' reports resulted from the manuscript's coherence rather than from careless reviewers.

### **5.3 Scholar experience 3**

The third person interviewed<sup>81</sup> is another author of a monograph. The publication process took twenty months.

#### **Manuscript submission**

This author submitted the manuscript in question with UTP because the press had published the author's first book, and the author found his editor to be very supportive. (This author published his first monograph with UTP because an acquaintance of his and his soon-to-be editor talked about his work at a social engagement, and the editor recommended that the author's manuscript be sent to the press.)

The author briefly considered pursuing publication at a commercial press but quickly decided that his work was too academic for trade publication. Moreover, at the time when the book was being written, the author was coming up for tenure review, and he believed that, to advance his career, he should publish with a scholarly press.

#### **Manuscript acquisition**

Sample chapters of this manuscript were brought before the PC before the entire text underwent peer review. The PC and the author signed a contract that was contingent on MRC approval and the receipt of funding. With this encouragement, the author took a year to complete his book.

When he submitted the book, it was too long, and his editor asked him to cut it by twenty-five per cent. The author did this willingly.

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<sup>81</sup> Author interview, Telephone interview, 27 January 2003.

## **Peer review**

After the author had sufficiently decreased the page count of his manuscript, the document was ready for peer review. The UTP editor solicited help from three peer reviewers, all of whom returned favourable reports within two months. The author incorporated their ideas about missing sections, missing references and factual corrections.

## **Funding**

This book received an ASPP grant. The author was not required to search for additional sources of funding. He was asked to finance the illustrations that he wished to include in the book, but due to past experience, he was aware that tracking down permissions for photographs is time-consuming, difficult and expensive, so he chose to omit the illustrations that he felt would have benefited his book.

## **MRC**

MRC review occurred within two months of the completion of the manuscript's dossier.

Contrary to this author's pleasure at receiving and implementing many of the peer reviewers' proposals, he felt that the MRC reviewer who read his manuscript was unhelpful. Whereas the peer reviewers brought forth opinions as suggestions, this author claims that the MRC reviewer issued his points in a "change this or else" and "staggeringly arrogant" fashion. This author assumed that the MRC reviewer skipped sections of his text, because the reviewer noted topics as missing from the manuscript, that the author contends were included.

## **Overall assessment of the publication process at UTP**

This author enjoyed working with his UTP editor and appreciates that his editor informed him of the status of his manuscript throughout the process. He is also pleased that the press allowed him to take part in the cover design of his book. The press not only permitted the author to produce the photo for the book's front cover,

it also provided him with a small fee with which to procure the image. Moreover, the press allowed the author to choose his copy editor, which the author valued immensely. Finally, the author was satisfied with the quick turnaround performed by the press. He felt that his editor and copy editor worked quickly on his behalf.

### **Opinion of scholarly review**

This author believes that reviewers perform a valid service but thinks that they should be held more accountable for their actions. He suggests that blind peer review be abolished to encourage this responsibility.

### **The next time ...**

This author states that loyalty will cause him to offer any new manuscript that he writes to UTP; however, he states that if he would also submit a more commercial work to commercial publishers, and publish it with whichever press offered him the best advance.

## **5.4 Scholar experience 4**

The fourth person interviewed<sup>82</sup> is a well-established scholar with a successful and extensive publication history. The publication process of his book took nine months.

### **Manuscript submission**

This author was presenting his research at an academic association lecture when a UTP editor approached him and let him know that UTP would be interested in acquiring his manuscript on the lecture subject. The author first approached the commercial houses with which he usually deals, but many of these presses claimed that his manuscript was too long and scholarly for them.

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<sup>82</sup> Author interview, Telephone interview, 28 January 2003.

This author believed that his subject would have appeal outside of Canada so he searched for an American university press to publish it in the United States and offered UTP Canadian rights.

### **Manuscript acquisition**

Based on an outline and a sample chapter, both UTP and an American university press signed this author and also signed a co-publication agreement.

This author's reputation and the perceived value of his book allowed him significant pull in contract negotiations. He arranged a significant advance and also obliged UTP to publish within nine months of receiving a complete manuscript.

### **Peer review**

This author stated that for his manuscript the peer-review process was just a formality. Scholarly review occurred at UTP, but the author claims that he did not think about the process or have much interest in what the reviewers had to say. This manuscript generated two favourable peer reviews.

### **Funding**

UTP did not search for a supplementary grant. Sales should make this book profitable for the press.

### **MRC**

Within three months of when the author submitted a complete manuscript, the MRC reviewed the document. It recommended the publication of the manuscript and pointed out minor mistakes to the author, and the author modified his manuscript accordingly.

### **Overall assessment of the publication process at UTP**

This author did not worry himself about UTP's publication process. He submitted a thoroughly prepared manuscript initially and did not expect to have to make changes. He was satisfied with the press's execution of the publication process and

commented that UTP produced an outstanding book jacket and succeeded in meeting all of its deadlines. He was also pleased with his relationship with his editor and believed that the editor helped him develop his manuscript.

### **Opinion of scholarly review**

This author respects the review process. He asks three or four colleagues to perform peer reviews of his work before he submits a final manuscript to a press, rather than waiting for press-selected reviewers to assess his manuscript. He comments that it is in his “interest more than anybody else’s interest that [his] manuscripts are scholarly in an impeccable way.” He acknowledges that peer review enables him to accomplish this excellence.

### **The next time ...**

This author will pursue the same co-publication deal with his next book.

## Chapter 6:

### Scholarly review: Problems and recommendations

Despite safeguards in the scholarly review process that encourage the consistent selection and development of good manuscripts, some issues within the process persist in impeding its effectiveness and the publication process's overall success. These problems include the length of the scholarly review process, the lack of reviewer accountability, the lack of MRC-member turnover, the susceptibility of the MRC to the pitfalls of group dynamics, and author unhappiness with the process.

#### 6.1 Length of the scholarly review process

Scholarly review depends on a number of people, groups and processes, and this results in lengthy publication cycles. The length of the process strains relationships between authors and the press, and it diminishes the ability of university presses to compete with commercial presses for popular manuscripts. From the time that an editor contacts an author to express interest in a manuscript to the time that a book is published generally takes between eighteen and twenty-four months (whereas the publication of a book at a trade house takes one year on average).

The following table displays each step of UTP's publication process and the amount of time that each of the process components should *ideally* take.

Table 1: Ideal time line for publication at UTP

Publication stage	Optimal time for completion
Manuscript considered by an editor	2 weeks
Find peer reviewers/Submit ASPP application	1–2 weeks (done simultaneously)
Reader's responses	6–8 weeks
Author response	4 weeks
Additional time awaiting ASPP decision	2 months
MRC decision	1 month

Publication stage	Optimal time for completion
Copy editing	1 month
Author review of copy editor's notes	1 month
Into production	3 weeks
Typesetting page proofs	1 month
Pages to author for review/index preparation	1 month
Production	4 months

The interviews with scholars 1 and 2 suggest that the press-controlled portion of the publication process causes more delays in scholarly publication than does scholarly review. For example, the three editors in the managing editorial department are overwhelmed with sending out and checking a backlog of manuscripts, which delays the copy-editing stage of publication. These editors would benefit from having a longer contact list of experienced copy editors, but these editors do not have time to train new freelancers. As a result, manuscripts can pile up at the copy-editing phase.

### **Recommendations**

Editors should educate authors about how complete and well-prepared manuscripts speed up the procedure. Often, authors submit manuscripts to UTP with illustrations, citations and information missing, and the press repeatedly receives manuscripts that are not formatted according to the guidelines set out in the press's *Author Handbook*: a guide that all authors receive when UTP considers their manuscripts for publication. Inconsistent and unfinished manuscripts impede the review process because peer reviewers must comment on each of the errors in the manuscript (and also because peer reviewers are more apt to delay reviewing manuscripts that have no clear purpose or coherent grammar). On the contrary, an orderly, complete manuscript is more likely to move quickly through the review process and copy-editing.

In their documentation, university presses must state their submission guidelines clearly and often to alert scholars to the importance of submitting thoroughly prepared manuscripts. UTP has its submission guidelines on its Web site and in its *Author Handbook*. The press should also mail out a submission checklist with the *Author Handbook* and warn authors that the press will not accept manuscripts for review until every item on the checklist is complete. Moreover, scholarly presses would benefit from touring campuses and giving seminars to graduate students about the scholarly review process and a press's expectations of scholars and their manuscripts. UTP editors currently tour campuses to alert scholars of UTP's publication lists and to discover new research topics under development. Instructional seminars about the responsibility of scholars in the publication process could be presented during these trips so as not to increase the press's expenses excessively. If authors comprehended the difference that well-prepared manuscripts make to the process schedule, they might exert more effort while preparing manuscripts, which, in turn, would speed up the review process.

Another reason why the scholarly review process can be lengthy is that unpublishable manuscripts can clog the system. Sometimes editors use the faculty publication board of their press as a "kill field." For example, on occasion an editor will handle a manuscript that passes through the peer-review and funding stage supported by reports that contain significant negative comments. As a result, the editor may not want to publish the manuscript but will have a hard time relaying this to the author because of the success of the manuscript at these two important review stages. The author, having received a grant and two recommendations for publication, will see no reason to stop the publication process at this point and will be angry with the editor for refusing to bring the manuscript before the MRC. In cases such as this, an editor sometimes passes the manuscript to the faculty publication board, and expects the MRC to reject the "iffy proposal before useless labour is expended on it."<sup>83</sup> If editors wait for the MRC to veto the project rather

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<sup>83</sup> Sparshott 199.

than stopping the project themselves, they may protect their authors' estimations of the press and instead direct the dislike of authors toward the MRC. This method of conducting a manuscript refusal can help editors maintain relationships with authors who may submit stronger manuscripts to UTP in the future; nevertheless, this practice lengthens the publication process and burdens the MRC with extra work, which may affect its ability to properly review pursuable manuscripts. Editors are also taxed, and they have fewer resources with which to manage their other manuscripts. In addition, another problem may ensue from this method of "killing" a manuscript; that is, the MRC may agree with the assessments of the peer reviewers and ASP Committee, providing UTP editors with little recourse for not publishing the manuscript. This practice of using a faculty publication board as a "kill field" lengthens the review process needlessly and should not occur.

UTP would hire more staff to shorten the length of the post-scholarly review, press-controlled portion of the publication process if its budget would allow it. The experience of scholar 4's priority manuscript demonstrates the speed at which scholarly review and publication can occur if a press is willing and able to devote adequate resources towards its publication. Since this solution is unlikely until scholarly publishers discover a way to make their craft financially profitable, the best way to improve the fallout caused by the pace of the process is to clearly communicate the limitations of scholarly presses to authors.

#### ***6.1.1 Aid to Scholarly Publications Programme review process's length***

The ASPP review process runs external to UTP and, therefore, UTP editors have no control over it. The ASPP site claims that it is "keenly aware of the necessity of peer assessment procedures that ensure fairness without imposing undue delays." The CFHSS Web site displays the following information, pertaining to estimates of the length of the ASPP process between 1 January 1999 and 31 December 1999.

Table 2: Average processing time of manuscripts at the ASPP<sup>84</sup>

	Average duration (in months)
All manuscripts	6.57
Manuscripts approved	6.72
Manuscripts approved after revision and resubmission	6.15
Manuscripts rejected	8.17
Manuscripts rejected after revision and resubmission	7.48
Manuscripts returned to author for revision and resubmission	7.39
Manuscripts ruled ineligible	0.78
Manuscripts withdrawn	4.46

The biggest complaint that UTP editors have about the ASPP concerns the length of the process and the unreliable time variances within that process. Like university presses, the ASP Committee cites external influences as the cause for delays. The committee insists that conflicting readers' reports and late author responses to readers' reports trigger most of the setbacks in the ASPP process.

The pilot program that permits university presses to find two peer reviewers, implemented by the ASPP for ACUP members, should shorten the review period. The new process simplifies and speeds up the process because editors are adept at finding peer reviewers: first, because they are more familiar with the scholars in the disciplines in which they publish; secondly, because the ASPP staff had to find reviewers in tandem with the ASP Committee, necessitating group discussions; thirdly, because UTP staff may be able to attract reviewers with an honorarium; and, fourthly, because editors are affected by the manuscripts that they represent so they are likely to find reviewers in less time than ASPP staff. To ensure that the process is just, editors must inform the ASP secretariat of the identity of one of the peer reviewers they have chosen and, if the secretariat or the ASP Committee

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<sup>84</sup> Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences Web site, <<http://www.hssfc.ca/english/aspp/lateststatistics.cfm>>.

perceives a conflict of interest, either can veto this selection, forcing the editors to find a different reviewer. If this occurs, the university press suggests a replacement and, on approval, the process continues.

In addition, the ASPP hopes that the use of e-mail and a manuscript data bank, which helps track and facilitate file handling, will decrease the amount of time that the ASPP needs to complete its grant-giving process. The ASPP also commends the virtual meetings of its committee members for keeping the program flexible and responsive, and thus minimizing the duration of the review process. Furthermore, to improve the speed of the process, the ASPP secretariat is currently looking to increase the number of people on the ASP Committees from two or three people to five or six. Morin-Parsons claims this increased size would allow the committee to evaluate more manuscripts, more quickly.<sup>85</sup>

### ***6.1.2 Length of the Manuscript Review Committee review process***

At least one month elapses between the time that manuscripts are ready for MRC review and the time that the MRC presents its verdict. The first scholar questioned for this report waited five months before receiving MRC approval because her manuscript was ready for review at the beginning of the summer.

Since UTP publishes 140 manuscripts annually, and the MRC reviews more manuscripts than that, fifteen MRC members are hard pressed to evaluate each of these manuscripts during their nine meetings a year. If most manuscripts ready for MRC evaluation over the summer months are not reviewed, come October, timely review of these manuscripts is difficult. Hence, it may take a few months before the MRC has time to review the backlog of manuscripts. This holdup angers authors who may have rushed to make peer review-suggested changes to their manuscripts in preparation for MRC evaluation.

## **Recommendations**

Over the summer, manuscripts requiring MRC review do build up and although UTP editors can get manuscripts reviewed by Summer Powers, scholars are often unavailable to perform these reviews. To ensure that there is a constant supply of reviewers who can and will assess manuscripts over the summer, one-third of the MRC members should be formally on call throughout the summer months. Summer Powers could remain an informal discussion of the manuscript, but members should expect to review at least one manuscript a month. When instated as an MRC member, these participants should have to specify which summer of their three-year term they will be available for reviewing manuscripts. If one-third of the MRC members volunteered during the summer, at least fifteen manuscripts would be reviewed, which would decrease the bottleneck that occurs during the first MRC meeting of the year and decrease the amount of time that some manuscripts await MRC evaluation.

### **6.2 *Lack of reviewer accountability***

Critics claim that peer reviewers and MRC members make publication decisions according to variables irrelevant to the quality of manuscripts. UTP editors and the ASPP Programme Manager disagree with this, and safeguards protect the integrity of the process against this problem. That said, the first scholar interviewed complained about an inappropriate twenty-six-page rant from one of her peer reviewers. The second scholar interviewed complained that her peer reviewers, although helpful, did not seem to give her manuscript an in-depth review. The fourth scholar interviewed revealed that his MRC reviewer evaluated in a “staggeringly arrogant” manner. My own experience suggests that sometimes MRC members forget the boundaries that constrain their positions. For example, during an MRC meeting, I witnessed a member recommend a work but then caution UTP against its publication because of an “inadequate” market. This comment was outside the jurisdiction of the MRC member; the responsibility of the MRC is to

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<sup>85</sup> Kel Morin-Parsons, Telephone interview, 22 January 2003.

determine the scholastic soundness and academic benefit of a manuscript, not its success as a business venture. The financially inspired observation ended promptly, because the MRC Chair steered the discussion to an appropriate area of conversation; however, this instance demonstrates that MRC members do not always base their decisions purely on the scholarly merit of manuscripts.

One of the process safeguards, blind peer review, actually facilitates the irresponsibility of reviewers. The one-way blind review system that UTP uses is sensible in theory. Masking the identities of reviewers enables them to freely criticize a manuscript without fearing repercussions and prevents them from elaborately praising a manuscript in order to establish a professional alliance. In reality, however, the identities of peer reviewers rarely remain secret. The pools of specialized scholars within many fields are too small to allow for blind peer reviews. In addition, editors often choose names of scholars that the authors recommend. In the experience of scholar 1, two peer reviewers were chosen from the four she recommended. According to scholar 2, two peer reviewers were chosen from the scholars she recommended. In these instances, and in scholar 3's experience, the authors learned all of their peer reviewers' identities. They guessed the identities by comparing their lists to their reviewers' comments. Later, they were certain of the names of their peer reviewers when the reviewers' comments were quoted on the back cover copy of their books or on the UTP Web site.

### **Recommendations**

Peer reviewers would be more careful about the thoroughness, tone and timeliness of their review, and the extent to which they allow their personal bias to dictate their review, if they had to be accountable for their actions and comments; hence, peer reviewers should identify themselves at the end of their reports. Scholars appreciate the value of peer review and the improvements that it provides their manuscripts. For this reason, peer reviewers should not balk at identifying themselves if they prepare their readers' reports in a scholarly and responsible fashion.

This alteration could also be made within the MRC. MRC reviewers who read manuscripts in detail should have to identify themselves to the manuscripts' authors. This would encourage members to read manuscripts thoroughly and to provide helpful advice; it would also prevent them from making instinctive and unthinking recommendations.

This change in policy may discourage scholars from participating on the MRC or from volunteering to be peer reviewers; however, if the literature about the motivations of these scholars is correct, identifiable peer review will mostly discourage scholars who would otherwise participate in the review process for the wrong reasons.

### **6.3 *Lack of Manuscript Review Committee—member turnover***

The long terms that MRC members currently serve may cause the scholarly review process to be less trustworthy because traditional group dynamics can prompt stagnation. In time, groups grow accustomed to reacting to stimuli in certain ways. As time passes, the reaction of groups to certain situations can become automatic rather than deliberate. In the case of the MRC, this tendency can cause the committee to always reject certain types of manuscripts and always accept others. This reaction may not actually reflect the beliefs of the individuals of the group, and yet the group's habitual response will prevail, preventing good but unconventional manuscripts from being acquired by UTP.

The long terms that members serve are also a problem because of the absence of a regulating mechanism. For example, if MRC members review a manuscript maliciously, or consistently prepare sloppy, unhelpful reports, then UTP has no recourse against them. While editors can choose not to contact peer reviewers again if they prove to be unfair reviewers, editors have no jurisdiction over unjust MRC members. In fact, even the Chair has no means to control an inadequate MRC member because asking the scholar to leave the committee would be a delicate, if

not impossible, task due to university politics. No procedure exists that facilitates an MRC member's release from the board.

### **Recommendations**

The potential stagnation of the MRC and the political impossibility of “firing” a negligent MRC member are problematic. Despite reassurances from UTP editors that MRC members are flexible and that they rarely produce unsuitable or narrow-minded reviews, a diplomatic practice should be in place to ensure regular MRC member-turnover. The MRC should prepare a mandate and detailed terms of reference that specify the faculty publication board's need for fresh viewpoints and a variety of experienced opinions. In following its terms of reference, the committee could enforce a maximum appointment on the MRC, which would enable the committee to diplomatically cleanse itself of unjust reviewers and to incorporate new, fresh-minded scholars into the faculty publication board.

The MRC-membership terms could mirror that of the ASP Committee and ASPP Management Board. These committee members serve a three-year term, which is renewable once. The ASPP feels that this system enables it to maintain vital and fresh members from a cross-section of academia. When the idea of limited MRC terms was presented to a UTP editor, she stated that appointment ceilings might eliminate unwanted members from the MRC, but that it would also remove excellent, experienced reviewers. This problem may be resolved by allowing members to return to the committee after a three-year break. The Chair could decide, in consultation with the university president, if these ex-members should be approached to serve on the committee again. At this time, the press can ask the favoured reviewers back (for another three plus three years) and not contact the less respected past-members of the board. The MRC Chair, who is appointed in his position only after proving himself as a first-rate MRC member, should be allowed to serve an additional five-year term, because it is important for the head of the committee to be experienced.

## **6.4 *Manuscript Review Committee groupthink***

A problem inherent in scholarly review at UTP is that the detailed report of the one MRC reviewer — who is likely not an expert in the manuscript's subject — may unduly affect the vote of his MRC colleagues. The final vote of the MRC often reflects the recommendation of the MRC reviewer who examines the manuscript in detail. MRC members must evaluate the complete manuscript dossier before establishing the manuscript's publication status if the faculty publication board component of scholarly review is to work successfully.

### **Recommendations**

In part, more frequent member turnover would decrease the instances of groupthink at MRC meetings. Individuals on boards tend to relax into their positions over time, but recently appointed members feel pressure to be respected by their new colleagues. Regular turnover would discourage the laxity that comes with comfort, compelling members to read dossiers thoroughly and perform their best to make a good impression.

## **6.5 *Author discontent***

The scholarly review process tests the patience of authors. Scholars are under pressure from their universities to publish, and they must wait through a lengthy and critical evaluation process without even a guarantee that the press will publish their manuscripts. As a result, authors are often uneasy and discontented during the process. Two of the four scholars surveyed for this report were unhappy with the lack of contact that they had with their editors because they felt unaware of the status of their manuscripts. The first scholar claims that she would have enjoyed her publication experience more if she had not felt that she was running after her editor to learn about the progress of her book. The second scholar was unhappy that she did not receive much feedback about her manuscript, especially after the MRC stage. Another cause of author discontentment was the pace at which the stages of the publication process were completed. Two of the scholars interviewed felt that

they had to “hurry up and wait” with their portion of the process while the press took too much time completing its responsibilities.

### **Recommendations**

Because the process is unlikely to speed up in the near future, editors can best keep their authors content by communicating with them. First, editors should explain to authors how the lengthy scholarly publishing process works to prepare authors for the process. (For an example of an explanatory letter, see Appendix 7.) Editors can prevent author disappointment by starting the process honestly. If the author in the second interview had understood scholarly publishing, she may not have been so shocked that no one at the press completely read her manuscript. Secondly, editors should check in with their authors once a month to inform them of the status of their manuscript and to ask the authors if they have any questions. Regular contact will appease authors and improve the chances that they will return to UTP to publish future manuscripts.

## Conclusion

To be successful, the scholarly review process must help a university press acquire and develop manuscripts, and, ultimately, guide the press's publication decisions. A successful process does this consistently and ensures that all books published by a press make an original contribution to knowledge. According to my experience at UTP and my interviews with four UTP-published authors, scholarly review at UTP accomplishes these objectives but with some difficulties.

Scholarly review enables UTP editors to acquire manuscripts of interest to scholars via their contacts in the academic community. UTP must ensure that it maintains a diverse publication list. The press can do this by being open to new subjects and creative projects and by ensuring that the MRC contains a varied and fluctuating membership from assorted disciplines. UTP's acquisitions also depend on what external associations and committees choose to fund; although their mandates will not always reflect that of UTP, UTP retains control over its publication list by having access to a variety of funding sources.

Scholarly review develops manuscripts according to the knowledge and comments of acquisitions editors, peer reviewers, MRC members and the ASP Committee (if the manuscript is eligible for an ASPP grant). Although UTP staff and the ASPP Programme Manager believe that peer reviewers are almost always conscientious when preparing their reviews, three of the four UTP-published scholars interviewed did not believe that peer review was totally successful in practice, but all of the scholars did believe that the UTP process improved their manuscripts. Although the opinions of the participants in the process can be influenced by external, inappropriate criteria, safeguards limit these arbitrary influences. UTP could decrease instances of reviewer irresponsibility by discontinuing its one-way blind policy. This would make all peer reviewers responsible for their comments, which might make them take greater care in producing their reports.

Scholarly review guides the press's final publication decisions via the faculty publication board's final recommendation or objection to a manuscript's publication. Sparshott is right in saying that the board's most important role is to set the standards to which the press aspires. The MRC should be driven by a combination of scholarly responsibility and a desire to support the wishes of the press, not by self-importance. Limited membership terms and reviewer accountability would encourage the faculty publication board to adjudicate manuscripts dependably.

The comment by scholar 4 that scholarly review was just a "formality" for his manuscript raises an issue regarding the fairness of scholarly review. Are some authors exempt from scholarly review while others are subject to rigorous examination? UTP offered this scholar an advance, which implies that the press decided to publish the author's work before peer review. For this reason, the process may have seemed a formality, but this scholar's manuscript still underwent scholarly review. If the peer reviewers or the MRC produced unfavourable reports, UTP would not have had the option of publishing the text.

Financial constraints cause some problems for the press. The scholars interviewed understood that financial limitations restrict the capabilities of university presses, and they did not question personally undertaking certain costs or responsibilities. What some interviewees did criticize was the press's poor job of selling their book, the length of the publication process and the lack of author/editor communication. Each scholar interviewed is considering publishing or has published an academic book with a commercial press in order to escape these drawbacks and to receive greater financial compensation. UTP acquisitions editors are not worried about losing a large number of scholars to commercial presses for two reasons. First, commercial presses would not acquire most scholarly monographs because they would not be profitable. Secondly, university presses provide their authors with important prestige that trade houses cannot supply. Nonetheless, university presses should consider these issues in order to develop author loyalty that will keep scholars returning to them for publication.

Scholarly review has a reputation for being long and arduous, and those involved in the process tend to blame this on external, uncontrollable peer review; however, some of the author experiences described in this report suggest that it is the press-controlled portion of the publication process, not peer review, that unduly lengthens the process. Slow publication derives from the lack of money in scholarly publishing, which results in inadequate numbers of employees with which to make scholarly publication efficient. Until scholarly publishers discover a way by which to make their craft financially profitable, the scholarly publication process will continue to be a slow method of preserving the integrity of university press publications.

While the scholarly review process is fallible (what process involving so many human elements is not?), its composition includes safeguards that generally protect university presses from making poor publication decisions. The process requires the participation of conscientious scholars and committees who can be trusted to prepare reasonable and thorough reports. There is a reason why “a common culture of academic publishing,” including the practice of scholarly review, has evolved throughout most English-speaking countries; the aspects of the system that seem problematic in the short-term are validated in the long-term when scholarly presses such as UTP develop first-rate reputations and are admired for publishing high-quality books that make original contributions to their fields.

## Appendices

Appendix 1: ASPP Registration Form

Acquisitions editors must fill out this registration form in order to commence the ASPP funding process. (Used by permission of the ASPP.)

Appendix 2: ASPP's Guide for Appraisers

This list of questions is on the ASPP's Web site and clarifies the issues that the ASP Committee wants peer reviewers to consider while reviewing manuscripts. (Used by permission of the ASPP.)

Appendix 3: Discipline and Series Listing

The following lists convey the disciplines and series that UTP publishes.

Appendix 4: UTP Decision To Publish (DTP) Form

This standard form is signed after UTP's Publishing Committee (PC) decides to publish a manuscript. Like an author contract, even a signed DTP is dependent on the publication approval of the MRC. (Used by permission of University of Toronto Press.)

Appendix 5: UTP's *Guide to Appraisers*

UTP acquisitions editors provide their peer reviewers with this sheet to regulate the content of the peer reviewers' reports. (Used by permission of University of Toronto Press.)

Appendix 6: Question List for Scholar Interviews

Four UTP-published scholars were asked this list of questions to acquire information for this report.

Appendix 7: Sample UTP Letter of Interest

UTP acquisitions editors may send their authors letters like this when they acquire manuscripts. This letter explains to authors how the scholarly review process works. (Used by permission of University of Toronto Press.)

# Appendix 1

	<b>Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences</b> <b>Fédération canadienne des sciences humaines</b>	<b>Aid to Scholarly Publications Programme</b> <b>Programme d'aide à l'édition savante</b>
<b>REGISTRATION FORM</b>		
<i>The purpose of this form is to accelerate the evaluation process. Before completing it, please read carefully the ASPP Guidelines, Eligibility Criteria and Procedure Booklet so that the criteria and procedures are understood. Please type or print the following information.</i>		
1) Author(s) / Editor(s)	2) Affiliation	3) Home address
<b>Citizenship</b> _____	Telephone (bus.) _____ E-mail _____ Fax _____	Telephone (res.) _____
4) Title of manuscript	5) Number of pages	
6) Application is being made by: (A) [ ] author(s) / editor(s) or (B) [ ] publisher on behalf of author(s) / editor(s). If (B), name publisher: _____		
7) If the application is being made by author(s) / editor(s), which publishers have you contacted, if any?		
8) Into which discipline(s) does the manuscript fall? PLEASE SELECT NO MORE THAN THREE AREAS FROM THE LIST OF DISCIPLINES PROVIDED WITH THIS APPLICATION.		
9) To what audience does this work address itself?		
10) Describe the aim, scope, content and methodology of the manuscript. Please e-mail this description to : <a href="mailto:secaspp@fedcan.ca">secaspp@fedcan.ca</a> NB: This description should be between 150 and 250 words. DO NOT SEND OVERLY LENGTHY DESCRIPTIONS. This summary will serve to identify potential assessors, and to judge whether the manuscript meets its objectives.		
415-151 rue Slater Street Ottawa, ON K1P 5H3	Tel/tél: (613) 238-6112 x.350 Fax: (613) 238-6114	E-mail: <a href="mailto:secaspp@fedcan.ca">secaspp@fedcan.ca</a> <a href="http://www.fedcan.ca">http://www.fedcan.ca</a>

11) Unrevised theses may not be eligible for ASPP funding. If this manuscript is derived from a thesis, describe the nature and extent of the changes which have been made. *Please refer to the ASPP Guidelines, Eligibility Criteria and Procedure Booklet before providing this information; use a separate sheet.*

12) If the manuscript in question is derived from a thesis, give the name of the thesis director and of all external and internal examiners on the jury. *Where and when was the thesis defended?*

13) Has any portion of this manuscript been published before, or is any part about to appear in print, in the same or a somewhat different form? If so, specify which parts, where and when. What revisions (if any) have been made to the material for inclusion in the present manuscript? Please give an estimate of the total number of pages of this work that have been published previously.

14) If this is a collectively written work, give the names, academic addresses (if any), and normal place of residence of all contributors. Given that a collective work may be considered only if it constitutes the result of a collaborative effort, and if there is substantive integration of chapters, explain as clearly as possible (*on a separate sheet*) how the work meets our criteria.

*NOTE: With the completed form please send FIVE copies of the Table of Contents (fully paginated), Preface, Acknowledgments, Introduction and Bibliography. If your manuscript is eligible for consideration, you will be requested to send two copies of the manuscript in its complete and final form (the ASPP arranges for simultaneous evaluation by two readers). Please note that the copies must be clean; heavily corrected manuscripts will not be accepted for evaluation. Do not send original, as manuscripts will eventually be destroyed.*

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2

### Content of the Report

Either directly or in the course of your report, please address the following questions :

1. Are the objectives of the manuscript clear?
2. Is the scholarship sound? Is the author thoroughly acquainted with the literature on the subject?
3. To what audience is the manuscript directed?
4. Do you have any suggestions for the improvement of the manuscript, relating to style, inaccuracies, omissions, or any other points, either substantive or editorial?
5. Is the presentation of the manuscript (grammar, inclusion of notes and bibliography, accuracy of notes, bibliography, and citations etc) of professional standard? Is the manuscript readable? Would this manuscript benefit by being shortened or lengthened? If so, please suggest what might be condensed or expanded.
6. How important is it that this manuscript be published, in light of the scholarship available? Is the manuscript:
  - a. a serious advance in state-of-the-art research
  - b. a major contribution to research
  - c. a contribution which, while modest, is interesting, and which can be recommended for publication
  - d. a very modest and limited contribution which can be recommended for publication
  - e. no contribution to the field; not recommended for publication
7. Is the manuscript acceptable for publication?
  - a. yes
  - b. no
  - c. not in its present form but a revised manuscript may be publishable (in this case, please indicate the nature of the revisions required)

## Appendix 3

### *Disciplines List*

- Anthropology
- Canadian Studies
- Canadian History
- Canadian Literature and Theatre
- Classics
- Communication
- Criminology
- Cultural Studies
- Economics
- Education
- English Literature
- Erasmus
- Film Studies
- Gay/Lesbian/Queer Studies
- Health and Medicine
- History of Medicine
- Italian Studies
- Law
- Literary Criticism
- Modern Languages
- Music
- Medieval and Renaissance Studies
- Native Studies
- Natural Sciences
- Philosophy
- Political Science and Theory
- Psychology and Psychiatry
- Religion
- Semiotics
- Social Work
- Sociology
- Theology
- Ukrainian Studies
- Urban Studies
- Victorian Studies
- Women's Studies

*Series List*

- Anthropological Horizons
- Benjamin Disraeli Letters
- Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan
- Collected Works of Erasmus
- Conference on Editorial Problems
- Collected Works of Northrop Frye
- Cultural Spaces
- Dictionary of Canadian Biography
- Digital Futures
- Erasmus Studies
- HSBC Bank Canada Papers on Asia
- Index Emblematicus
- Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC)
- Master Craftsmen
- Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching (MART)
- Mental and Cultural World of Tudor and Stuart England
- Series in Public Management and Governance
- Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History
- Phoenix Supplementary Volumes and Phoenix Presocratics
- Renaissance Society of America Reprint Texts (RSART)
- Records of Early English Drama (REED)
- Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia (RIM)
- Selected Correspondence of Bernard Shaw
- Studies in Book and Print Culture
- Studies in Comparative Political Economy and Public Policy
- Studies in Early English Drama (SEED)
- Studies in Gender and History
- The British Library Studies in Medieval Culture
- Themes in Canadian Social History
- Toronto Italian Studies
- Theory/Culture
- Toronto Medieval Texts and Translations
- Toronto Studies in Philosophy
- Toronto Studies in Semiotics and Communication
- Trends Project
- University of Toronto Romance Series



*Decision to Publish Form, page 2*

**Managing Editorial Comments on Manuscript:**

Copy Editing Cost: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Managing Editor

**Markets Expected:**

Sales of Similar UTP Books:

ISBN	Price	Author	Title	PubDate	Sales

	Cloth	Cloth	Paper	Paper
Price and Discount				
Libraries and Wholesalers				
Bookstores				
College Bookstores				
Edition Sale				
Other				
Sales Total				
Frees				
Total Printing				

**Effective Discount:** Trade 46% Monograph or text 26% (please circle one)

**Sales Forecast:**

	cloth	paper
First Year		
Second Year		
Third Year		
Total		

Recommended Publication Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Rating: A B C (circle one)

Extraordinary Promotion Budget: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Design Requirements: (full-colour cover, dust jacket, etc)

\_\_\_\_\_

Marketing Manager /designate \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 5

### Guide for Appraisers

We would like the benefit of your opinion on the interest and value of the subject and on the strengths and weaknesses of the organization and content of the manuscript. We do not ask you to make a detailed list of typographic or similar errors, although a statement about the physical condition of the manuscript would be helpful. Among the specific questions we ask you to consider in your reading are the following:

1. What is the thesis of this work? Is the scholarship sound and up-to-date? Does the manuscript make a significant contribution to its field?
2. Is the presentation effective, in terms of style and organization?
3. What is the primary audience for this work? To what extent is it likely to appeal to readers outside its main area of scholarship and to general readers?
4. What are the major books published on this subject? How does this work compare with them?
5. What revisions would you suggest? Do you recommend publication, with or without revision?

Reports should be typed on one side of the page only, with generous spacing for ease of reading. Please do not write on the manuscript itself without our permission.

We will not reveal your identity to the author or to anyone else aside from members of certain publishing committees for whose deliberations such information is essential.

Please keep in mind that the author will receive a copy of your report so do not include in it anything that will easily identify you to the author or any comments you do not wish the author to receive (Such comments can be included in a covering letter to the editor).

We expect an appraiser to report within four weeks of receiving the manuscript from us, unless another period has been agreed upon with the editor.

Remember that the manuscript remains the property of the author; unauthorized duplication of it constitutes a violation of copyright.

When you have completed your report, please return the manuscript and the report to University of Toronto Press, 10 St. Mary Street, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M4Y 2W8

Your honorarium will be sent on receipt of the report and the manuscript. Personal expenditure for postage will be reimbursed if brought to our attention.

## Appendix 6

### *Question List for Scholar Interviews*

#### **Submitting your manuscript**

1. On what criteria did you base your decision on where to submit your manuscript?
2. Did you consider submitting your manuscript to a commercial press? What advantages do you perceive a commercial press would provide you with over a scholarly press and vice versa?
3. Did you send your manuscript to other publishers while it was under consideration with UTP?

#### **Acquisitions**

1. How much time elapsed between when you first sent your manuscript to UTP and when you heard from the editor about whether or not it would be published?
2. Did you feel that your editor explained to you what to expect of scholarly review at UTP?
3. Were you asked to revise your manuscript before publication? At which stage of the process? Did you object to this request? Why?

#### **Peer review**

1. What was your perception of your peer reviewers?
2. Do you believe they reviewed your manuscript fairly?
3. Were you asked to revise/resubmit? How many revisions of your manuscript did you complete?
4. Do you feel that peer review improved your manuscript?
5. Do you feel that your manuscript was reviewed in an appropriate amount of time?
6. Did your author's response accept revisions as well as refuse to make revisions? Were your refusals to make changes respected?

#### **Funding**

1. Was your manuscript eligible for ASPP funding? Did you receive it?
2. Did you participate in a search for funding?
3. How do you feel about an author's responsibility for funding permissions? Creating the index?

#### **MRC**

1. What is your opinion of the UTP faculty publication board?
2. Do you believe it treated your manuscript fairly?
3. Were you asked to revise and resubmit your manuscript?
4. If possible, would you change this committee/this committee's role in scholarly publishing?

#### **Post-publication**

1. How long did the publication of your manuscript take?
2. When did you actually sign a contract for your book?
3. Were you aware of the status of your manuscript at each stage of the process?
4. How would you improve the process?
5. Have you published any other books? How did the situation compare?
6. Have you ever peer reviewed another scholar's manuscript? Did you find that changed your opinion of the process?
7. Did anything surprise you about the scholarly review process?
8. The next time you publish a book, will you do anything differently?

## Appendix 7

June 21, 2002

Dr. John Smith  
Department of English  
University of Toronto  
Toronto, ON  
A2H 6P9

Dear Dr. Smith,

Thank you for submitting a proposal for your manuscript *Sample Book Title* to me for consideration for publication. I am indeed intrigued by your proposal and would like to see the completed manuscript. In an effort to anticipate some of the questions that you might have concerning publishing with the University of Toronto Press, I will outline the general process for you. Once you submit the manuscript to me, I will assess it myself, and if it indeed fits into my list and is ready to be assessed by scholars, it will undergo a full peer-review process. As this process involves considerable time and costs, we ask that the manuscript be on exclusive offer to us during this period (about six months).

For the majority of our books by Canadian authors, we also apply for a grant in aid of publication, which helps to offset editorial and production costs. When you submit the manuscript, please complete and return the enclosed application form for the Aid to Scholarly Publications Programme (ASPP). If I accept the manuscript for review, I will apply to the ASPP on your behalf. Two reports from experts in the field will be obtained. You will be invited to respond formally to both reports in due course. With two encouraging reports and a solid response the ASPP and I can then approach our respective committees for a decision concerning funding and publication.

At UT Press, the decision to publish rests with two committees. The Publishing Committee consists of senior officers of the Press representing marketing and sales, production and design, finance and administration, and editorial interests. They will be concerned with the overall financial picture for the book, address markets, set print runs, prices, and design requirements, and so on. The Manuscript Review Committee is a body of senior scholars appointed by the president of the University of Toronto. One member of the committee is assigned to read the manuscript, and all members review the reports on the manuscript and the author's response to them. The committee is the final arbiter of works that may be published by the University of Toronto Press.

I have enclosed a copy of our *Author Handbook*, which gives an overview of our publishing process. Please pay particular attention to chapter five on manuscript preparation. You can also find this material, and additional information about our publishing program on our website.

If you have any questions concerning the preparation of the manuscript, the peer review process, or the stages of publication at UT Press, please don't hesitate to contact me. Otherwise, I look forward to receiving your manuscript for further consideration.

Sincerely,

Acquisitions Editor

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