

**AN EXAMINATION OF ACQUISITIONS: THE CASE OF
UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA PRESS**

by

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Abstract

Although it is one of the seminal activities in scholarly publishing, acquisition of new manuscripts is little discussed in either academic or professional literature, or in publishing courses or programs in educational institutions. The creative and entrepreneurial aspects of acquisitions may elude description, but many aspects of the process and its major determinants can be described. This report begins with an examination of acquisitions literature and educational opportunities. It looks at the acquisitions process at a mid-sized Canadian scholarly publisher, University of British Columbia Press, the factors that influence it, and results of these influences, providing practical examples of acquisitions in action. From there, the report describes and analyzes strategies employed by the press's editors to acquire manuscripts, as well as venues and activities where they seek prospective authors. Lastly, discussion turns to UBC Press's strategies for dealing with future challenges in the scholarly publishing industry.

Keywords: acquisitions; editing; university press; publishing; scholarly.

Subject Terms: Editing – Decision making; Scholarly Publishing – Canada; University Presses.

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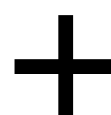
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Preface

Editorial acquisitions strategy at UBC Press

Many aspects of scholarly publishing – including editing, management, accounting, marketing, distribution, and data tracking – are explored in some depth in peer-reviewed journals and business-to-business publications.¹ Yet, there has been little more than general statements and recommendations on the subject of the acquisitions process – that is, the submission of manuscripts from an author to an acquisitions editor, or the solicitation of a manuscript or book by an acquisitions editor from an author, and the factors that influence decisions to publish. This report takes a closer look at the process of acquiring manuscripts in scholarly publishing, and captures some of the determinants in an editor’s – and a press’s – acquisitions decisions.

The foundation of this report comes from my internship between April and August 2008 at the University of British Columbia Press, or UBC Press, in Vancouver, B.C. The internship gave me the opportunity to closely observe the manuscript acquisition process, through attendance of an introductory meeting between an acquisitions editor and a prospective author; editorial acquisitions meetings, where the press’s editors and director decide which manuscripts to pursue; and a major gathering of social sciences and humanities academics in Canada, where many scholarly manuscripts were pitched, discussed, and acquired. Further information on the acquisitions process and decisions have come from interviews with UBC Press’s acquisitions editors.

This report is divided into three chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of UBC Press’s operations as related to acquisitions, a review of scholarly and professional literature on acquisitions, and an examination of the training and education available to

¹ *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Journal of Scholarly Publishing*, and *Publishing Research Quarterly* are among the scholarly journals with articles on acquisitions editing. Among business-to-business or professional publications, *Quill and Quire* and *Publishers Weekly* also discuss acquisitions. For an analysis of how the literature addresses acquisitions editing issues, see pages 17–25.

acquisitions editors. First, a brief history of the press, its areas of specialization, and the skills and backgrounds of the acquisitions team provide context to decisions about which proposals are pursued. Next, a review of literature on scholarly acquisitions and a consideration of the extent to which theory informs practice aims to give insight into publishing strategy and reasons for acquisitions decisions. This literature cuts a wide swath through some acquisitions-related subjects, including publishing fashions, technology, the scholarly book market, and academic trends, although funding – a major factor in acquisitions decisions – is under-discussed. Finally, the chapter examines the current training and education offered to acquisitions editors, and where acquisitions knowledge resides in the industry. Together, these elements provide the framework within which acquisitions editors learn their craft.

The second chapter gives a detailed description and analysis of the current editorial acquisitions process at UBC Press, based on observations of acquisitions meetings and qualitative interviews with acquisitions editors, to illuminate what factors inform their decisions. Specifically, this chapter describes the venues at which editors seek manuscripts and proposals, and the methods they employ to persuade scholars to publish with UBC Press. From there, the determining factors in accepting a proposal, and then a manuscript, as well as the general relative importance of these factors, are explored. The chapter goes on to discuss forces outside the immediate control of the acquisitions editor, such as funding and decisions of peer reviewers, and ways in which editors can nevertheless influence these factors.

The third chapter identifies some of the challenges facing UBC Press's acquisitions activities, and suggests ways the press can meet these challenges to enhance future prospects.

The press has already employed some of these methods, including the building of new series and collaborations with multi-collaborator research initiatives, with some success. Others, such as increasing integration of departments, have been explored but not yet implemented fully. This chapter also examines some tools, information, and strategic changes that could aid UBC Press's acquisitions editors in performing their duties more effectively.

1

**Structure and Function of
the Acquisitions Process
in Scholarly Publishing**

A Brief History of UBC Press

Established in 1971, UBC Press is Canada's third-largest university press and one of the country's largest publishers west of Toronto. UBC Press publishes fifty to sixty scholarly monographs and collections in the social sciences and humanities, enjoying a sterling reputation in numerous disciplines. Its large and varied lists in political science, law, western Canadian history, and Asian studies are unparalleled among Canadian university presses, and its titles have won many prestigious awards for scholarly works in the social sciences and humanities, including the Raymond Klibansky and Harold Adams Innis Prizes from the Aid to Scholarly Publications Program, the Donner Prize, and numerous other discipline-specific awards. UBC Press was recently recognized by the Association of Book Publishers of British Columbia (ABPBC) as 2008 Publisher of the Year.

UBC Press's success and stature among university presses in North America, however, is relatively recent. The press endured a near-death and resurrection in the late 1980s and early 1990s that has been documented by academic studies such as Simon Fraser University Master of Publishing project reports, and internally prepared reports such as the *UBC Press Review: 2007 Self-Study*. This change was so dramatic that the self-study divides the press's history into pre- and post-1990 periods.

Pre-1990, UBC Press had been struggling financially for years and was publishing ten to fifteen books a year in a wide array of disciplines. The press's transformation began in 1990 with the appointment of Peter Milroy, a book publisher with 20 years of experience in trade, scholarly, college, and legal publishing – and arguably Canada's most experienced acquisitions editor in social sciences at the time – as director. Spearheaded by Milroy, the press underwent a wholesale restructuring that included dismissal of staff members,

increased technology use, and expansion into marketing and distributing services for other publishers.²

UBC Press also refocused its areas of publication. After the restructuring, Milroy developed the editorial program to more aggressively acquire manuscripts in the press's more consistent areas of strength, such as western Canadian history and First Nations studies, while cutting acquisitions in areas that were already being pursued by more prestigious and better-financed publishers, such as literary criticism and literary history.³ Despite complaints from scholars in these disciplines, this strategy allowed Wilson, who was the only acquisitions editor on staff from 1990 to 1993, to focus on areas of strength and build UBC Press's reputation, rather than spreading her efforts thinly across many disciplines.⁴

The hiring of Laura Macleod in 1993 as the press's second acquisitions editor was fortuitous, says Wilson. Macleod, who lived in Toronto, became UBC Press's *de facto* central Canadian office, raising its national profile while giving her the opportunity to pursue manuscripts and scholars in central Canada. Macleod's hiring precipitated UBC Press's expansion into other disciplines, particularly political science.⁵ In 1998, Emily Andrew was hired to succeed Macleod, and developed Macleod's early acquisitions efforts into Canada's pre-eminent scholarly list in political science, as borne out by the press's large and varied list, number of awards, and her own prestige in the country's political science community. She also developed major lists in military history and Asian studies during this time.⁶ In the same

² *UBC Press Review: Self-Study 2007*, UBC Press and the University of British Columbia, March 2007, 2; Peter Milroy, interview by author, March 6, 2009.

³ *UBC Press Review*, 2.

⁴ Jean Wilson, interview by author, October 30, 2008.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Milroy, interview.

year, the press hired Randy Schmidt, who had been working in the editorial-production department, to acquire manuscripts in environmental and resource studies, which flourished under his command. Schmidt later developed the country's dominant list in legal studies and the environment. Melissa Pitts of Toronto joined the press as assistant director and eastern Canada manager in 2005; in addition to managerial duties, she acquires (on a part-time basis) manuscripts in Canadian history and urban planning.⁷

Jean Wilson retired in July 2008. She was succeeded by Darcy Cullen, also formerly of the editorial-production department, who took over Wilson's files in regional history, First Nations studies, northern studies, and education, among other disciplines.

Current Areas and Modes of Acquisition

At present, these are the acquisitions editors and the subject areas in which they acquire manuscripts:

Emily Andrew: Asian Studies, Political Science and Political Philosophy, Military History, Transnational and Multicultural Studies, Communications

Darcy Cullen: Canadian History, Regional History (i.e., B.C. and other regions), Native Studies, Sexuality Studies, Northern and Arctic Studies, Health Studies, Education

Melissa Pitts: Canadian History, Sociology, Urban Studies and Planning

Randy Schmidt: Forestry, Environmental Studies, Sustainable Development, Geography, Law and Society⁸

⁷ *UBC Press Review*, 3; Wilson, interview.

⁸ "Staff directory," UBC Press :: University of British Columbia Press.
<http://www.ubcpress.ca/company/staff.html>.

While these are the mandated core fields where most editorial activity takes place, the press occasionally publishes books in other areas. In highly specialized projects, Milroy may handle acquisitions duties, as he has in the past with large projects such as the four-volume reference *The Birds of British Columbia*, and complex, heavily illustrated books such as *Chinese Opera: Images and Stories* and *Vanishing British Columbia*.

Several common threads run through the press's acquisitions team. Each of the four acquisitions editors, as well as the recently retired Wilson, holds a graduate degree related to his or her areas of acquisitions among their qualifications. As will be noted in "Scholarly Literature on Scholarly Acquisitions" (page 6), an advanced degree is often considered a basic qualification for scholarly acquisitions editors, so that they speak the language of academics and understand the scholarly environment. Moreover, Cullen and Schmidt both began at UBC Press in editorial-production, and have manuscript editing experience at the press as well as knowledge of its publishing process. This serves as a major advantage in communicating with authors; Schmidt notes that he can articulate the entire production process clearly to authors writing their first book, or a first book with UBC Press.⁹

Both Andrew and Pitts also have extensive experience in publishing outside of acquisitions, giving them extra insight into the business side of the industry. Andrew has worked in rights at HarperCollins Publishers, and sales and marketing at University of Toronto Press and at a major literary agency, and Pitts's experience includes sales and marketing management at University of Toronto Press. With these backgrounds, Andrew and Pitts have a deeper understanding of the selling points and challenges of marketing and selling a book while it is still a manuscript or even a proposal, giving them a wider

⁹ Randy Schmidt, interview by author, November 10, 2008.

perspective and sense of publishing strategy.¹⁰ The acquisitions editors' diverse skill sets and experience provide great benefit to UBC Press by covering the spectrum of the publishing process and the Canadian publishing industry.

The foregoing sections examined the context of UBC Press's list. To understand how the press's challenges and strengths fit into the wider context of acquisitions in scholarly publishing, this report will next examine literature, education, and training for acquisitions editors to determine how they reflect – or rather, how well they reflect – acquisitions practices at UBC Press.

Scholarly Literature on Scholarly Acquisitions

Despite the “scholarly” adjective in reference to “literature,” there is little academic discussion of the scholarly publishing process, particularly on the subject of acquiring new manuscripts. A survey of recent literature on editorial acquisitions shows that most scholarly articles about acquisitions editing are general and unsystematized, with titles such as “Five Movie Scenes from the Author/Acquisitions Editor Relationship”¹¹ and “If You Plan It, They Will Come: Editors as Architects.”¹² These articles chiefly discuss the general nature of acquisitions, provide portraits of a “perfect” acquisitions editor, and remind readers of an editor's mandate to find solid scholarship without regard for profitability.

¹⁰ Milroy, interview.

¹¹ Edward Dimendberg, “Five Movie Scenes from the Author/Acquisitions Editor Relationship,” *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 28, 1 (October 1996), <http://www.proquest.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca>.

¹² Peter J. Dougherty, “If You Plan It, They Will Come: Editors as Architects,” *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 31, 4 (July 2000), <http://www.proquest.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca>.

A number of articles, including many in *Chronicle of Higher Education*, attempt to demystify the process of manuscript submission, editing, publishing, and marketing.¹³ This perhaps reflects academics' general lack of awareness of the scholarly publishing process, and the role of the editor and publisher in that process; on the flipside, it may also reflect the continuous need for scholarly publishers to educate junior scholars on publishing opportunities as membership in the academy changes. Indeed, Sanford Thatcher writes in the *Journal of Scholarly Publishing*, "In the new electronic age, when more and more scholars think they need only a computer and the latest version of QuarkXPress to be their own publishers, there is a greater need than ever for us to define what we as publishers bring to the process of scholarly communication."¹⁴ His subsequent explanations of an acquisitions editor's functions are intended to help readers – that is, people in scholarly publishing – expound the benefits of the university press. To acquire appropriate manuscripts for publication, it appears that editors at scholarly presses must explain what it is they do with manuscripts and why. Some of the activities UBC Press acquisitions editors engage in to raise awareness of scholarly publishing in general, and of their press in particular, are addressed on page 30.

The dearth of scholarly literature is not surprising, given that acquiring new books is considered the most mysterious and subjective process in publishing. Editor Mary Schendlinger has asserted that acquisitions "is the most entrepreneurial part of the

¹³ Some of these articles include: Elizabeth Demers, "Getting a Real Job in Publishing: a Ph.D. in History Finds Her Dream Job as an Acquisitions Editor," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 50, 32 (April 16, 2004), <http://chronicle.com/proxy.lib.sfu.ca/weekly/v50/i32/32c00301.htm>; Rachel Toor, "The Book Editor: Midwife, Handmaiden, Groupie," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 43, 46 (June 13, 1997), <http://chronicle.com/proxy.lib.sfu.ca//che-data/articles.dir/art-43.dir/issue-46.dir.htm>; Clement Vincent, "Don't Judge a Book By Its Editor," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 54, 9 (April 16, 2008), <http://chronicle.com/proxy.lib.sfu.ca/weekly/v54/i09/09c00101.htm>.

¹⁴ Sanford G. Thatcher, "The Value-Added in Editorial Acquisitions," *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 30, 2 (January 1999), <http://www.proquest.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca>.

publishing business,”¹⁵ the most personal, and the most creative. Director of University of Pennsylvania Press Eric Halpern calls acquisitions editors “the impresarios of a publishing house,” adding that “they must rely on their own inner qualities and motivations, their own judgment, ambition, and, it has to be added, charm ... the press can only be as good as what their editors bring in.”¹⁶ The personal and creative nature of acquisitions editing is undoubtedly one of the reasons it is rarely taught explicitly or singly, as will be discussed in “Education and Training of Acquisitions Editors” on page 14.

Another reason for the lack of literature may be related to two characteristics of the scholarly publishing industry: it is collegial, and it is slow. For the most part, acquisitions editors are too busy to keep up with academic musings on acquisitions strategy; instead, they confer with colleagues at both their own and other presses to compare strategy and practice – often in ways that other industries, gagged by competition and proprietary interests, cannot.¹⁷ In addition, the nature of acquisitions is slow and multi-faceted. The success of an acquisitions program – and the acquisitions editors who perform its functions – can be measured in several ways: cohesiveness of manuscripts found, rejection rate, and number of desired manuscripts acquired in competition with other presses. Further in the process, author satisfaction and quickness of turnaround can be linked to the efficacy of acquisitions processes. The measure of a successful acquisition, asserts Doug Armato, director of University of Minnesota Press, does not begin until transmittal, when a manuscript officially moves into production.¹⁸ A major part of acquisitions success is gauged by audience

¹⁵ Mary Schendlinger, in discussion with author, September 14, 2008.

¹⁶ “Finding and Training Acquisitions Editors,” audio recording of seminar by Doug Armato, Eric Halpern, and Philip Pochoda, presented at Association of American University Presses 2008 Annual General Meeting, July 18, 2008.

¹⁷ Schmidt, interview.

¹⁸ Armato, quoted in “Finding and Training Acquisitions Editors,” July 18, 2008.

response – strength of reviews, course adoptions, sales, and awards. Even further in the future, success can be measured by number of reprints, demand for updated editions, and influence on future scholarship. Because these many measures of success often stretch into years, there can be little scrutiny of the acquisitions process in the early stages. On hiring a new acquisitions editor, Eric Halpern asserts that “when you’re hiring an editor as a junior editor, it will take, say, five years to build a head of steam in a new field, and almost as long to determine that things aren’t working as you hoped.”¹⁹ This statement easily applies to assessing the effectiveness of an acquisitions program. If it takes years at a minimum to determine the success or failure of an acquisitions program, drawing assertions across several different presses would be an immense labour for any scholarly study, on top of other variables.

The financial factors that influence acquisitions editing are little discussed in the literature, possibly because the mandate of scholarly publishing is to disseminate knowledge in important academic areas where book publishing may not be profitable. Although scholarly publishers are supposed to produce works of worthwhile scholarship with little to no regard for profitability, if not financial viability, the fact is that they *do* make decisions based on sales potential and funding availability as well as scholarly merit. This phenomenon is more readily acknowledged in professional literature on publishing, such as *Quill and Quire*, where the majority of articles on scholarly publishing from 1993 to 2008 deal with publishers’ financial difficulties and various efforts to publish more profitable books. Financial influences on acquisitions decisions are further discussed in chapter 2.

There are some exceptions to the dearth of scholarly literature on the influence of financial planning on acquisitions. In a 1999 article, Mike Shatzkin asserts that financial tools

¹⁹ Halpern, quoted in “Finding and Training Acquisitions Editors,” July 18, 2008.

such as profit-and-loss (P&L) statements would be more useful if they attempted to quantify factors related to profitability. For example, variables such as price points for books in various formats and subjects, and level of funding for particular academic fields, could be applied to financial estimates of a book's cost and reward. Taking many such variables into account is no guarantee of an accurate estimate; however, the acquisitions process at many publishers does not even "make any attempt to measure the different degrees of risk associated with different acquisition decisions ... almost all acquisition decisions are made with one set of sales assumptions, an idea as hard to defend as it is ubiquitous."²⁰ Shatzkin recommends that publishers consider the best, worst, and most likely scenarios when drawing up P&L statements and making sales assumptions.

An article in the *Journal of Scholarly Publishing*, entitled "The Characteristics of the Ideal Acquisition Editor," summarizes the model and content of most scholarly literature on the subject. Noting that "a good acquisition editor is the heart and soul of a list and the reason authors come back to a press after their first book,"²¹ it suggests several universal qualities in a model acquisitions editor that can optimize a press's list and retain successful authors. A number of similar articles suggest attributes of the ideal acquisitions editor. Obviously, traits can be manifested in different ways, and some attributes are not appropriate for some editors or their acquisitions strategies, or for some university presses. The table below summarizes selected characteristics from scholarly literature, how they can work to a press's advantage, and disadvantages they may carry:

²⁰ Mike Shatzkin, "Editorial Decision-Making: Risk and Reward," *Publishing Research Quarterly* 15, 3 (Fall 1999): 55–62.

²¹ Bill Harnum, "The Characteristics of the Ideal Acquisition Editor," *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 32, 4 (July 2001), <http://www.proquest.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca>.

Characteristic	How it can be applied	Disadvantages
Competitiveness with other presses	Can concentrate on developing and improving manuscript ideas, meeting “the highest standards of scholarship and literary quality” ²²	Can lead to “shortcircuiting of regular procedures, the too liberal use of advance contracts, the questionable resort to ‘package deals’” – in short, to dilution of scholarship ²³
Skill and experience in manuscript editing (substantive, stylistic, copy editing, etc.)	Can give their manuscripts additional editorial insight, adding a layer of scrutiny to the process; strong understanding of “structure, narrative, style and synthesis” ²⁴	Strong focus on editing may downplay importance of research content; “many publishers have acquisition editors whose sole task is to acquire books, and who have no experience in hands-on editing at all ... there is little opportunity to do any substantive work” ²⁵
Have PhD or advanced degree in field of acquisition	Can facilitate better understanding of the practices and lingo of the scholarly research process; recognize strong scholarship	May have tendency to focus too strongly on their area of study, losing acquisitions opportunities in other areas
Strong individual vision and confidence	Can strengthen personal involvement and commitment to the strength of their list; can help to “serve as activist in using our lists to communicate our message to the public” ²⁶	Must maintain balance of other perspectives from other members of the publishing chain; ²⁷ “Must remain modest enough to learn from the advice of knowledgeable others” ²⁸
Good contacts in field of acquisition	May be knowledgeable about their subjects; broad scope of knowledge; may be able to acquire desirable manuscripts; more likely to find appropriate peer reviewers	May pursue books they want instead of strengthening and diversifying the press’s list; “editors may think the best authors in a field are the ones they happen to know” ²⁹

²² Ibid.

²³ Sanford Thatcher, “Competitive Practices in Acquiring Manuscripts,” *Scholarly Publishing* (January 1980): 112–32.

²⁴ Demers.

²⁵ Rosemary Shipton, “Value Added: Professional Editors and Publishers,” *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 27, 4 (July 1996), <http://www.proquest.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca>.

²⁶ Dougherty.

²⁷ As Shipton argues in “Value added,” “publishers should set up a system that encourages people involved in a book project to talk to one another.”

²⁸ Halpern, quoted in “Finding and Training Acquisitions Editors,” July 18, 2008.

²⁹ Ibid.

Knowledge of emerging trends	Up-to-date knowledge of field can help sell more books and influence scholarship ³⁰	May constantly be seeking the next big trend instead of focusing on bread-and-butter manuscripts
Understanding of academic market	“Mastering the terrain and culture” of academic readership may be result in higher sales ³¹	May search for guaranteed sales rather than groundbreaking, controversial manuscripts
Imagine successful books before they approach	May help conceptualize success through strong vision	May discard too many potentially successful proposals that don’t fit the mould of an ideal book ³²

As the table shows, many characteristics of an ideal acquisitions editor can be contradicted – and are, in the literature itself. This suggests that these qualities are identified subjectively and are highly dependent on factors such as the size of the university press, the breadth of the press’s list, the fields in which the editor acquires, the publishing process at the press, and the qualities of the production, marketing, and distribution departments that work with the editor. Milroy, a 40-year veteran of the publishing industry and a former acquisitions editor, notes that many publishing companies in Canada were started or developed by amateurs who made up strategies as they went along. There may be some generalities to choosing what books to publish, or what characteristics in an editor secures the most desirable books, but “every situation is different and every book is different.”³³

Professional Literature on Scholarly Acquisitions

In addition to scholarly literature, there is a variety of professional literature on the Canadian publishing industry to be found in periodicals such as *Quill and Quire*, and newsletters and

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Philip Pochoda, quoted in “Finding and Training Acquisitions Editors,” July 18, 2008.

³² Ibid.

³³ Milroy, interview.

periodicals from publishing associations, including the Association of American University Presses (AAUP), the ABPBC, the Association of Canadian Publishers (ACP), and the Association of Canadian University Presses (ACUP). Articles in these and other similar periodicals focus on the practical aspects of scholarly publishing and are probably more widely read; at UBC Press, for example, *Quill and Quire* is circulated as a hard and electronic copy, and association e-newsletters are routinely sent to all staff members. However, like the scholarly literature, the professional literature contains little discussion of acquisitions editing in any form, particularly when it comes to scholarly publishing.

An oft-discussed issue at UBC Press meetings is the shrinking market of individuals purchasing scholarly monographs, the *raison d'être* of university presses. This is similarly reflected in the pages of *Quill and Quire*, which published seven articles in the last ten years on various strategies employed by Canadian university presses to raise readership. As early as 1997, *Quill and Quire* suggested that because “most scholarly books in Canada do not sell more than 500 copies ... why not simply make bibliographic records and abstracts available electronically and let libraries print copies of the book – utilitarian ones, admittedly – if and when clients demand them?”³⁴ This phenomenon has been attributed to shrinking budgets for libraries, once reliable buyers of monographs, and will be further explored in chapter 2.

Professional literature in the 1990s also indicated a trend toward awareness of competition from other scholarly presses as well as trade publishers. At the same time, trade publishing by university presses was being vigorously pursued. *Quill and Quire* has examined in detail the shift of Canadian university presses to seeking out titles with trade appeal and

³⁴ Scott Anderson, “Publishable or Perishable?” *Quill and Quire* (November 1, 1997), http://www.quillandquire.com/news/article.cfm?article_id=933.

buttressing them with higher publicity budgets and inventive marketing schemes.³⁵ However, American university presses that have dipped into trade publishing “have seen mounting deficits due to heavy returns,” and have even abandoned marginal academic fields, in some cases jeopardizing their scholarly mandates, to keep their dubious trade programs afloat.³⁶ Tracking these trends has allowed university presses and interested scholars to see how colleagues across North America are dealing with industry-wide problems related to lists, if not individual acquisitions.

Education and Training for Acquisitions Editors

In addition to literature, publishing professionals’ training and education informs theory and practice in scholarly publishing. Jean Wilson notes a generational divide in the way new acquisitions editors are trained. When she began her editing career at University of Toronto Press in 1968, she received two years of apprenticeship as a copy editor while on the job, with senior editors going over her work. This practice, she says, has become less commonplace, replaced by publishing program internships and increased use of specialist freelance editors.³⁷ Laura Macleod agrees, noting that “there’s no time for young editors to apprentice anymore.”³⁸

A relatively new phenomenon, publishing programs and courses, are growing in number, and are becoming an important avenue in influencing publishing practices by

³⁵ Nadia Halim, “The New-Look Scholarly Press,” *Quill and Quire* (November 1, 1998), http://www.quillandquire.com/news/article.cfm?article_id=1232.

³⁶ Paul Spendlove, “Pop Appeal: Most University Presses Want It – But at What Price?” *Quill and Quire* (November 1, 2002), http://www.quillandquire.com/news/article.cfm?article_id=2521.

³⁷ Wilson, interview.

³⁸ Laura Macleod, “Education for Acquisitions,” *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 28, 4 (July 1997), <http://www.proquest.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca>.

producing many qualified and motivated – if not experienced – individuals who are entering the industry. Notable publishing programs in Canada include Simon Fraser University’s Master of Publishing Program and Summer Publishing Workshops, Centennial College’s Book and Magazine Publishing Program, Humber College’s Creative Book Publishing Certificate, and Ryerson University’s Publishing Certificate Program. Internationally, prestigious publishing programs and courses are offered at Oxford Brookes University and the University of Reading in the United Kingdom; the National University of Ireland; the University of Stirling in Scotland; and Columbia College, New York University, and Stanford University in the United States. Publishing programs can also be found in Australia, Germany, India, Kenya, Malaysia, and the Netherlands, among other countries. In examining the websites for these programs, I found that none offers any formal course in acquisitions, and few even include it on a list of expected outcomes or skills acquired.³⁹

Wilson also noted that she received much benefit and training from meeting industry colleagues in provincial and national associations. Since her career began, the number of these industry organizations has grown, and they have figured more significantly in the publishing industry, continuing to offer education and training for both freelance and staff editors of all types.⁴⁰ Some of Canada’s industry organizations include the Editors’ Association of Canada (formerly the Freelance Editors’ Association of Canada, which

³⁹ An exhaustive list of publishing programs would be lengthy, but some of the university websites explored were: Centennial College Book and Magazine Publishing program, Toronto ON (<http://www.centennialcollege.ca/thecentre/book>); University of the Witwatersrand BA in Publishing Studies, South Africa (<http://web.wits.ac.za>); Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology BA in Publishing Studies, Ghana (<http://www.knust.edu.gh>); University of South Queensland Master of Editing and Publishing, Australia (<http://www.usq.edu.au>); Oxford Brookes University MA Publishing (<http://ah.brookes.ac.uk/publishing/postgraduate/>); Pace University MS in Publishing (http://www.pace.edu/page.cfm?doc_id=6619); and New York University MS in Publishing (<http://www.scps.nyu.edu>). Other publishing programs are listed at “SFU Library – Publishing Programs,” Simon Fraser University, <http://www.lib.sfu.ca/researchhelp/subjectguides/pub/schools.htm>.

⁴⁰ Wilson, interview.

Wilson helped to found in 1979), ACP (1976), ACUP (1972), and, more locally, the ABPBC (1974).

Macleod noted these absences more than ten years ago when she wrote that higher education publishing programs and editors' associations offer training in copy editing, managing editing, structural editing, and proofreading, but "very little for acquisitions beyond an introductory lecture or two." She further argues that, "contrary to the opinion that acquisitions editors are born, not made, many acquisitions skills can in fact be taught."⁴¹ Her own "wish list" of teachable acquisitions-related topics includes:

- effective presentation of prospective projects to other members of the publishing team, including both press staff and editorial board members
- retention of good authors
- research methods to recognize market trends and indicators
- contract negotiation and development⁴²

In fact, many of these skills are being taught; the latter three, for example, are discussed in detail in Simon Fraser University's Master of Publishing Program, albeit not as major concepts, and not under the rubric of acquisitions editing. The AAUP, the foremost scholarly press organization in North America, has many educational resources, expert lists, regional and national conferences, and workshops where publishing staff can exchange information and industry wisdom on many publishing subjects, but similarly has relatively few resources on acquisitions editing. One of those resources was a two-day program in 2008 aimed at new and early-career acquisitions editors that explored:

- list building (defining your niche, building in new areas quickly, pb reprints and co-pubs, and book series)

⁴¹ Macleod.

⁴² Ibid.

- title budgets (from the P&L to the pub plan)
- contracts (royalties & advances, subsidiary rights, and digital rights issues)
- the publishing process (peer review, working with support staff, the editorial board)
- ethics and competition with other presses
- communications with in-house colleagues (especially working with marketing)
- managing authors in the publishing partnership process⁴³

Again, several of these subjects are explored in publishing programs and courses, including the Simon Fraser University Master of Publishing Program. It appears that many acquisition-related topics are covered in the educational initiatives, but there is no curriculum model for what areas should be covered when teaching acquisitions editing.

Milroy calls publishing “anarchistic,” with a history of entrepreneurs reinventing the rules of the trade with each new venture. While there are certain pervasive industrial models that approach the status of accepted industry wisdom – for example, he says that many financial parameters for scholarly publishing emerged from the model of McGraw-Hill – most publishers had to invent their strategies on the fly.⁴⁴ This is borne out by a 2008 AAUP panel session entitled “Finding and Training Acquisitions Editors,” in which three senior members of U.S. scholarly presses discussed strategies for hiring and teaching acquisitions editors. Some general principles were trotted out, but the session mostly demonstrated that even experienced professionals at prestigious university presses do not have systematic practices when it comes to hiring or training new acquisitions editors. For example, University of Pennsylvania Press has no training process; new acquisitions editors are copied

⁴³ “Annual Meeting: Workshops,” program for acquisitions workshop, AAUP Annual Meeting, June 25–26, 2008. <http://www.aaupnet.org/programs/annualmeeting/2008/workshops.html>.

⁴⁴ Milroy, interview.

on all memos, and attend board meetings and formal seminars for interns – including a new acquisitions editor with no previous scholarly publishing experience.⁴⁵

Because different presses have achieved success in their particular areas of publishing through myriad acquisitions strategies, there is no accepted paradigm for acquisitions success. What may therefore be valuable to educational and training programs in the future is an overview of acquisitions editing strategy with case studies, which looks at strategies employed at different presses, and benchmarking of their results. This would be more easily accomplished with scholarly presses than with trade, as scholarly presses are more structured and generally pursue manuscripts in the same fields.

Generally, publishers think of basic editing as the foundation upon which to build editorial skills, and acquisitions as the cornerstone of creating good books – the decision-making on which manuscripts are worthy of editing in the first place. In a 1991 article, former University of Washington Press editor-in-chief Naomi Pascal demanded that acquisitions editors demonstrate competence in foundational editing skills – such as substantive, stylistic, and copy editing – even if they won't be doing the actual work: "Very few acquiring editors, it is true, have the time to carry out meticulous line editing of every manuscript they bring in. But shouldn't all dentists know how to clean teeth, even if they usually leave the actual performance to others?"⁴⁶ Milroy adds that experience and knowledge in publishing areas such as marketing and sales provide valuable background for acquisitions editors, as it has for Emily Andrew and Melissa Pitts. Formal curricular programs, he says, help students develop the "vocabulary" of publishing and learn the basic

⁴⁵ "Finding and Training Acquisitions Editors," July 18, 2008.

⁴⁶ Naomi B. Pascal, "The Editor: In Search of a Metaphor," *Publishing Research Quarterly* 7, 2 (Summer 1991): 53–57.

structure and function of the industry, but students don't graduate with industry-ready skills – only experience in the workplace can equip them with those.⁴⁷

Macleod recommends that university presses “place more emphasis not only on developing formal training opportunities for beginning acquisitions editors, but also on education for those in mid-career.”⁴⁸ Milroy agrees, citing short, intensive workshops – such as the aforementioned AAUP workshops – as excellent training opportunities.⁴⁹ In practice, however, scholarly publishing staff are already severely taxed on time and forced to operate on skimpy budgets, making mid-career educational activities a challenge to accomplish. At UBC Press, for example, “the level of activity makes it difficult to allow for consistent staff training and professional development”⁵⁰ in all editorial activities, including acquisitions.

Conclusion

While many generalizations can be made about scholarly publishing, the unique history, staffing, areas of focus, and strategies of each university press are so varied that one cannot broadly apply a conclusion about one press to another. For this reason, because the nature of acquisitions is itself slow and multi-faceted, and because publishers discuss such acquisitions theory outside the confines of the journal, scholarly literature chiefly offers generalizations that may outline the ideal for acquisitions but often bear little resemblance to reality. Professional literature, on the other hand, tends to be case-specific and to focus on news and market trends. Publishing programs and courses offered by higher learning institutions and professional associations concentrate on bricks-and-mortar subjects in

⁴⁷ Milroy, interview.

⁴⁸ Macleod.

⁴⁹ Milroy, interview.

⁵⁰ *UBC Press Review*, 50.

publishing while appearing to teach little about acquisitions, but in fact do touch upon numerous aspects; rather, they lack a cohesive curriculum plan on acquisitions editing because there is no pervasive industry model or strategy. Training opportunities exist for early- and mid-career acquisitions editors, however, and these educational and training avenues may mature and mingle with the apprenticeship model that has been prevalent in “traditional” acquisitions training of the previous generation of editors.

The incomplete picture of acquisitions gleaned from these sources points to a strong focus on the practical aspect – the actual acquiring of manuscripts. As noted previously, despite the valuable lessons that can be learned in an academic environment, being an acquisitions editor is a vocation that requires a great deal of entrepreneurship, on-the-fly learning, and multi-tasking, qualities that are more effectively acquired and honed in the workplace than in the classroom. Chapter 2 will explore the acquisitions process in detail, based on observation and analysis of practices at UBC Press.

2

**Editorial Acquisitions Processes
at UBC Press**

While chapter 1 examined theoretical constructs around acquisitions, this chapter will look at acquisitions practice at UBC Press. Specifically, I will explore how numerous factors both inside and outside the press influence the decision to publish, examine how the press attracts prospective authors, and look at some strategic concerns related to acquisitions, such as list-building and series creation.

The acquisitions process in scholarly publishing is markedly different from that of trade publishing, with a highly regimented system in place to ensure a work's academic integrity. After a manuscript proposal is approved for possible publication by the press director (usually seeking consensus of the acquisitions editors), peer reviewers scrutinize the manuscript and offer their assessments. The author then has a chance to respond to any criticisms of or questions about the manuscript. From there, the press's publications board, composed of scholars independent of the press's staff, approves publication under the university imprint based on the reviewers' assessments, the author's responses, and further input from the editorial staff. The final decision to publish, however, rests with the director.

Acquisitions editors and publishers look for certain things in a book, readers look for others, and board members still others. While these attributes may not be mutually exclusive, the differences often influence decisions on whether a book will be published. Factors outside the direct publishing process, such as maintenance of good relations with the scholarly community at large and competition from other presses for the manuscript, can also affect the publishing decision. Lastly, thinking about an overall strategy for acquisitions will be explored.

Pitching UBC Press to Authors

An acquisitions meeting between senior editor Emily Andrew and Dr. Karen Flynn, a professor of African-American Studies at the University of Illinois, is the foundation for the following discussion. The two discussed Flynn's proposal for a manuscript that explores the history of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, focusing on women who have migrated to Canada.

The meeting took place in Vancouver, where Flynn was attending the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, or simply "Congress" (a major scholarly meeting that will be discussed in detail in "Where to Acquire Manuscripts" on page 27). During this meeting, Andrew noted the reasons she was interested in the manuscript: the research explores new terrain in the history and sociology of Caribbean-born women in Canada. Furthermore, the proposed book would fit into several of UBC Press's traditional areas of strength – Canadian history, gender studies, and transnational and migration studies. The fact that the manuscript has a secondary focus on nursing was of interest; UBC Press, Andrew noted, has recently developed a sub-list in Canadian nursing history with books such as *An Officer and a Lady: Canadian Military Nursing and the Second World War*, *Healing Henan: Canadian Nurses at the North China Mission, 1888–1947*, and *Place and Practice in Canadian Nursing History*. The synergy created by these books, Andrew suggested, could help get Flynn's book read by more scholars.

In pitching UBC Press to a prospective author, Andrew discusses sales points that can be divided into two parts: creating the best possible book out of the author's scholarship, and getting the finished book into the hands of as many readers as possible – in other words, the editorial and production process, and marketing, sales, and distribution. Both of these aspects of the prospective author sales pitch will be described below.

Editorial and production process

Andrew cited UBC Press's record of author satisfaction and high number of repeat authors as credentials of its strong editorial and production staff. She made especial note of the expediency of the publishing process thanks to the press's better use of technology, greater selectivity, and commitment to a high level of service to authors. If all processes go smoothly, the release of a scholarly monograph can take as little as nine months from the receipt of the author's final manuscript submission (although ten to twelve months is a more typical time frame). This makes UBC Press twice as fast as other major Canadian university presses at publishing a book – a quality that, while not important to the press in itself, is viewed as important by authors. Furthermore, Andrew said, the press's acquisitions editors are committed to reading significant portions of a manuscript before the review process, giving the author greater confidence in the work before it is submitted for peer review. (It is an open secret that few acquisitions editors read much of an author's manuscript at all.) This means that, along with the copy editor, at least two editors – the acquisitions editor and the production editor – will read most or all of the manuscript during the publishing process.

Andrew also detailed the major areas where she could be helpful in making suggestions to the author. These include:

- smoothing transitions between chapters;
- identifying opportunities to push scholarship into new directions. For example, Andrew noted that the history and sociology of black Canadians from the 1920s to the 1950s has been little studied. This is an area of focus this book could pioneer if Flynn wishes to examine this time period;
- pointing out emerging scholarly trends, which could help the author tailor a manuscript for higher readership or course adoption potential.

As the latter two points indicate, Andrew is professionally interested in having a solid overview of an academic field, which can provide helpful counterpoint to a scholar's specialization.

An important part of a press's ability to publish any manuscript is available funding. (While presented as a given during the meeting, funding is an under-discussed if not ignored area in scholarly literature. For further discussion, see "Funding" on page 47.) Andrew told Flynn about several major funding sources for scholarly books for which her book is eligible. While Flynn was encouraged to seek out possible funding sources to support publication from her home institution or from research organizations in related fields, Andrew assured her that UBC Press would apply for funding on her behalf to raise the likelihood of publication should the work be accepted.

When an accepted manuscript passes to production, Andrew said, UBC Press employs professional proofreaders, a practice that is becoming less prevalent among university presses due to cost. Attention is also paid to a book's design; the press employs prestigious freelance designers to give each book a distinctive cover, and many have won design awards. The interiors of many books are designed and typeset using templates created by award-winning book designers, which makes the finished book attractive but still takes advantage of production efficiencies, expediting the production process. Finally, the press's books have been recognized with excellent reviews and numerous awards in all fields in which it publishes.

Above all, Andrew further encouraged Flynn to find a press that was a good fit for her needs, and, as she noted to me after the meetings, she refrained from speaking of the disadvantages of other presses, such as lack of personal attention. In a small and collegial

industry such as scholarly publishing, it is usually counterproductive to berate the competition, even if a press tacitly defines its strengths in comparison with others.

Distribution, sales, and marketing

During the meeting, Andrew emphasized the reach of UBC Press's distribution network. UBC Press has a distribution agreement with University of Washington Press (UWP), which lists UBC Press books in its catalogue and sells them to U.S. bookstores and book-buying venues. UWP also displays, promotes, and sells UBC Press books at selected U.S. learned society conferences it attends. While many U.S. academics and booksellers view Canadian scholarly books with suspicion, Andrew said UBC Press is expert at getting its books sold south of the border. In addition, Peter Milroy attends major international rights events, including the Frankfurt and London Book Fairs, the AAUP annual general meeting, and BookExpo America, maximizing opportunities for subsidiary rights sales.

Additionally, while it is common practice among university presses to release hardcover and paperback editions simultaneously to facilitate course adoptions, UBC Press releases paperbacks at least six months after the hardcover release. This allows the press to maximize hardcover sales, chiefly to libraries. The delayed paperback release also affords a book a second chance at being highlighted in the press's catalogue, prolonging its life in the frontlist.

Finally, UBC Press is highly conscious of the timing of book releases. Fall books are aggressively marketed for higher education course adoptions in both the fall and winter semesters, while spring books gain a central presence at the annual Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences in late May and early June. In fact, books are often rushed

through production and printing with an eye to Congress; as noted in the following section, Congress is the most important venue in Canada to launch and display new scholarly works in the social sciences and humanities, and many authors enjoy launching books there to show their colleagues across the country. It is also the major venue to court prospective authors – one of those, of course, being Karen Flynn.

Where to Acquire Manuscripts

Because there are always opportunities to find a manuscript, most editors never really get out of “acquisitions mode.” However, academic and learned society meetings are one of the most effective places to acquire; the critical mass of academics in attendance, the general atmosphere of scholarly enthusiasm, and the myriad papers and presentations prepared for these meetings make them ideal venues at which to hear about cutting-edge scholarship and scoop up manuscript ideas. In turn, scholars expect publishers to attend (or at least send representatives to) these meetings, so they often arrive armed with questions and book proposals to shop around. University presses always showcase their titles at such events, but Milroy notes that book sales don’t make attendance worthwhile at most conferences, especially those in the U.S. Rather, the acquisitions opportunities and goodwill generated for press authors are the chief reasons to attend academic meetings.⁵¹

In 2008, the University of British Columbia hosted the largest-ever Congress, with over 10,000 delegates in attendance representing sixty-eight learned societies and seventy-two universities, colleges, and academic institutions from across North America. The hub of university press activity is the Congress book fair. Here, publishers display recently published

⁵¹ Peter Milroy, interview by author, March 6, 2009.

books in hopes of sales and course adoptions, while acquisitions editors meet their existing authors and hunt for new authors and projects. In turn, academics come with papers, presentations and seminars, trying to generate interest in their research among publishers as well as colleagues. There is even a perennial Congress-sponsored session about how to get published, featuring a panel of Canadian university press editors and managers, that is usually well attended.

The 2008 Congress hosted thirty-one scholarly presses, including every established university press in Canada, the international conglomerates Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press, major U.S. scholarly presses – Harvard, Yale, and the University of Chicago among them – represented by one distributor, the scholarly vanity press The Edwin Mellen Press, and the commercial academic presses Fernwood and Between the Lines Press. Several trade publishers were also present, including the multinationals Penguin and Random House, and the independent B.C. presses Arsenal Pulp Press, Anvil Press, and Talon Books.

A survey of Canadian scholarly publishers

To gain a big picture of acquisitions activities at Congress, I gathered information from representatives of eleven Canadian scholarly publishers.⁵² The presses came from six provinces and had publishing programs ranging in output from under ten books per year to over 160. All presses had at least one acquiring editor present: five had one acquisitions

⁵² The presses were: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc. and Women's Press (Toronto); Wilfrid Laurier University Press (Waterloo), Athabasca University Press (Athabasca), University of Alberta Press (Edmonton), Canadian Plains Research Center at the University of Regina (Regina), McGill-Queen's University Press (Montreal and Kingston), University of Toronto Press (Toronto), UBC Press (Vancouver), Black Rose Press (Montreal), Broadview Press (Peterborough), and Emond Montgomery Publications (Toronto). For survey results, see page Appendix I: Survey of Canadian Scholarly Publishers, page 75.

editor attempting to acquire manuscripts, three had two editors, and three had three or more.⁵³ (Even trade presses were trolling for manuscripts; *Soucouyant*, the acclaimed novel by Simon Fraser University professor David Chariandy, was acquired at Congress several years before by Arsenal Pulp Press.) Furthermore, all presses distributed take-home material encouraging prospective authors to consider them when submitting proposals, usually by referring them to their web site. Only four presses, however – University of Toronto Press, McGill-Queen’s University Press, UBC Press, and Black Rose Books, the three largest and the smallest of the eleven presses – provided hard-copy submission guidelines for authors.

Representatives from all presses were also asked how many meetings they had had with authors (scheduled or unscheduled, with at least one manuscript idea discussed) and the approximate proportion of these meetings that were author-initiated. By the fifth day of Congress, each press had met with between five and fifty academic authors. Among both large and small presses, authors were responsible for initiating a substantial proportion of these meetings; according to the editors interviewed, authors were considered “mostly” the initiators of manuscript pitches at University of Toronto Press (Canada’s largest scholarly press), Broadview Press (a medium-sized press), and the press of the Canadian Plains Research Center (a small press). This information only reflects a portion of the Congress period, and most editors did not keep track of numbers of meetings or who initiated them, but it is clear that both scholarly presses and scholars consider Congress an important venue for acquisitions activity: both initiate meetings that may lead to manuscript submission and publication. And because presses of all sizes are engaged in author-initiated meetings, it

⁵³ Not surprisingly, they were the three largest university presses in Canada: University of Toronto Press, McGill-Queen’s University Press, and UBC Press.

appears that a large part of acquiring is making one's press visible at key events and oneself available to prospective authors.

Other acquisitions activities

Acquisitions editors also actively solicit manuscripts outside of Congress and other learned society meetings. To attract as many interested scholars as possible, the editors tour a cluster of universities – up to five per week for two or more weeks – to give academic book publishing workshops. These workshops ostensibly provide general information for scholars who are interested in publishing, such as characteristics to look for when choosing a publisher, converting a dissertation to book form, and writing an appealing proposal.⁵⁴ However, workshops also raise the press's profile to scholars, particularly those based in central or eastern Canada, and act as fact-finding missions to determine what scholars are working on and whether it might be of interest to the press.⁵⁵

Some authors sign on to UBC Press after making first contact at these workshops, but given the length of the publishing process, these meetings often do not bear fruit for quite some time. As the UBC Press Self-Study states, “this is a long-term investment, and manuscripts rising from these meetings can appear anywhere from several months to several years after our visit.”⁵⁶

Lastly, acquisitions editors read scholarly journals to keep abreast of interesting research and see emerging trends in particular disciplines. Interesting articles often lead to a follow-up cold call to a scholar to express interest in their work. This is obviously a

⁵⁴ Jean Wilson, interview by author, October 30, 2008; Randy Schmidt, interview by author, November 10, 2008.

⁵⁵ Schmidt, interview; Darcy Cullen, interview by author, November 10, 2008.

⁵⁶ *UBC Press Review: Self-Study 2007*, UBC Press and the University of British Columbia, March 2007, 24.

scattershot strategy, and very often a scholar is far from having enough material to complete a manuscript, but a simple phone call can be flattering and remind a scholar of his or her options of where to publish.

The methods and venues for UBC Press acquisitions editors to find prospective authors are varied, as seen in this chapter so far. However, the process of moulding ideas into a fully approved and reviewed manuscript is much more structured.

Vetting a Book Proposal

As stated in “Getting Your Manuscript Accepted” on the UBC Press website, a proposal must contain “a physical description of the manuscript (length, rough number of illustrations, tables, and figures), a table of contents, abstract, and chapter-by-chapter description. The place of the work in the context of other literature in the field should be indicated, as should the level of audience.”⁵⁷ Despite the specificity of these guidelines, the level of detail in submitted proposals varies greatly. This affects an editor’s assessment of the prospective manuscript’s level of interest, fitness for publication, and appropriateness for the press’s list. (I will elaborate on this point in “Factors in Acquiring Manuscripts” on page 33.) In some cases, the acquisitions editor may ask the submitting author to revise a proposal – sometimes more than once – to increase the likelihood of smooth acceptance at a subsequent acquisitions meeting. Such a strategy can help the author more clearly articulate his or her work, says Milroy. It forces the author to develop a plan and coherent outline for

⁵⁷ “Publishing with UBC Press: Getting Your Manuscript Accepted,” UBC Press :: University of British Columbia Press. <http://www.ubcpres.ca/company/ahgettingaccepted.html>.

his or her manuscript on paper, conceptualize an audience, and demonstrate ways in which the manuscript differs from published works and contributes to scholarship.⁵⁸

A proposal is also useful as a preliminary assessment of the author's writing ability. By judging the author's ability to articulate and organize ideas, present a compelling argument, and demonstrate competence in grammar and other mechanics, the editor can gauge how much work might be required on a forthcoming manuscript.

Acquisitions Meetings

Any proposals deemed ready for the next step are brought to the bi-weekly acquisitions meeting, attended by the acquisitions editor and the director. In general, all proposals that meet a minimum standard of interest or quality of writing are brought to the acquisitions meeting; this gives other editors a chance to vet a title on its own merits, and see if a questionable proposal could be developed to fill some niche. It is not unusual for an acquisitions editor to bring forward a proposal he or she has some doubt about, as UBC Press is attempting to grow its list. However, the editor should only bring proposals that are sufficiently complete for the other editors and the director to make an informed decision.

While an editor may outline strong reasons to accept a manuscript and advocate its publication at the acquisitions meeting, he or she will also note the faults inherent in the proposal and express his or her reservations about it. From there, the other editors and the director discuss the work informally to decide whether they want to see a completed manuscript.

⁵⁸ Milroy, interview.

In the meetings I attended, there was little controversy about proposals. After some initial discussion, the decision to proceed or not is usually heavily weighted in one direction, if not unanimous, and nearly all decisions are reached by consensus. Furthermore, most proposals are accepted, probably because they have already been vetted by the acquiring editor.

Factors in Acquiring Manuscripts

Based on acquisitions meetings attended from May to October 2008, here is a description of the factors mentioned in decisions on which proposals to accept:

Fit into UBC Press list. This is the most commonly mentioned factor in deciding whether to pursue a manuscript. If a book proposal about unsuitable subject matter arrives over the transom, it is usually rejected and referred to a more appropriate press. (Such, as mentioned in chapter 1, is the collegiality of the scholarly publishing industry.) A book's subject matter is also a major factor in projecting its sales (see "Sales and course adoption potential" on page 35). When discussing a prospective manuscript's fit in the press's list, editors frequently compare it to previous books, using them as case studies of sorts to predict the success of the present proposal. Series in which the proposed book may fit are always suggested.

Acquiring in familiar fields also makes future work easier in other departments. Production, sales, and marketing data on previous books in the field can be used to estimate future parameters, such as production cost, number of course adoptions, and library sales, and help inform decisions such as print run and markets to target.

Funding availability and eligibility. As Canadian university presses are not-for-profit organizations, they depend heavily on subsidies to publish. The most important criterion for any piece of work remains good scholarship. However, without any potential source of funding, there is a good chance that a manuscript will not make it to peer review. (Funding is discussed further on page 47.) Exceptions have been made for works where funding is unavailable; a recent example is *The Big Red Machine: How the Liberal Party Dominates Politics* by Stephen Clarkson, one of Canada's most famous political scientists and a Governor General's Award winner for co-authoring *Trudeau and Our Times*. Clarkson's fame combined with subject matter that has wide appeal while still fitting into UBC Press's list made *The Big Red Machine* viable to publish even without outside funding. (The book has sold 4,000 copies.)⁵⁹ Another example, says Schmidt, is the upcoming title *Multi-Party Litigation: The Strategic Context* by Wayne V. McIntosh and Cynthia L. Cates, a study of class action lawsuits that is expected to do well in reviews and sales. He notes that such a book must be either a work of groundbreaking scholarship, a significant book in a subject area where the press hopes to raise its profile or "break in," or a book that fills an important niche and is likely to yield high sales.⁶⁰

That being said, notes Cullen, UBC Press often publishes works written by Canadian scholars, which makes many of them eligible for support from the Aid to Scholarly Publications Program (ASPP), the principal source of funding for Canadian scholarly books (further discussed on page 48).⁶¹ Authors are also asked to pursue or provide information on funding opportunities specific to their fields.

⁵⁹ All numbers of copies sold taken from UBC Press Cognos Sales History Database, accessed November 20, 2008.

⁶⁰ Schmidt, interview.

⁶¹ Cullen, interview.

Sales and course adoption potential. Despite the scholarly literature and innumerable university press mission statements that claim otherwise, sales play a role in the decision to publish. Books expected to sell well or have many course adoptions are often published more quickly, where possible, to realize greater profits. Sales usually depend most heavily on a book's subject. Sales also inform other criteria; for example, monographs generally sell better than edited collections (see next item). As noted in "Fit into UBC Press list," sales and adoption potential are often estimated by looking at how previous books in the same subject areas have fared.

Subsidiary rights are considered a minor factor when acquiring a book, given the narrow focus of many scholarly monographs. Books about the U.S. or Asia have sold successfully in the past in those territories, but subsidiary rights sales generally are no substitute for funding or other criteria when deciding whether to accept a proposal.

Monograph or collection? Monographs tend to sell in higher numbers and pick up more course adoptions, and are less time-consuming and more straightforward for the acquisitions editor (and for production editors and marketing staff). The editor need only deal with one author – or several authors in a multi-authored work – and one set of revisions, instead of multiple versions from different contributors. There are usually fewer concerns about inconsistency, unity, varying levels of scholarship in individual contributions, and authors meeting deadlines. Alison Cairns noted the monograph's advantages in her Master of Publishing project report, asserting that "UBC Press is becoming more and more adamant that collections must be outstanding before it publishes them."⁶²

⁶² Alison Cairns, "An Analysis of the Operation of the University of British Columbia Press with an Emphasis on Scholarly Editing," Master of Publishing project report, Simon Fraser University (Spring 2005): 31.

Crossover potential in other disciplines. Sanford Thatcher noted in a 1999 article that, “because of their broad view of the scholarly horizon, editors often have a special fondness for interdisciplinary writing, and it is no accident that university presses publish a great deal of it.”⁶³ In the last decade, there have also been increasing numbers of multi-collaborator research initiatives – such as the Network of Centres of Excellence program – that fund interdisciplinary studies and encourage publication in these areas. Whatever the reason, research with a high degree of interdisciplinarity is fashionable among scholars. From a publishing point of view, an interdisciplinary book can target more than one scholarly audience, which may make it more attractive to publish.

Milroy notes, however, that some disciplines are quite parochial, with scholars gravitating toward “pure” explorations of those disciplines. For example, history and political science do not generally mix well. Interdisciplinary books may also have lower course adoption potential, since most undergraduate courses focus on a single subject area.⁶⁴

Crossover potential in trade. UBC Press’s publishing program is not trade-focused, but the editors and director are conscious of opportunities for particular books to sell well among general readers. In past meetings, however, it is clear that trade crossover potential is not usually a deciding factor in the publishing decision, but merely a consideration when estimating sales potential.

Length. UBC Press tends to publish books consisting of 80,000 to 110,000 words, or 220 to 300 typeset pages. Shorter books may be perceived as having less value for the retail price, whereas longer books take more time and resources to produce, although there can be a

⁶³ Sanford G. Thatcher, “The Value-Added in Editorial Acquisitions,” *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 30, 2 (January 1999), <http://www.proquest.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca>.

⁶⁴ Milroy, interview.

certain “economy of scale” associated with large books, since a production editor must devote some time to becoming acquainted with a subject, no matter what the length. Large scholarly monographs are also less likely to be used in course adoptions, as instructors may be reluctant to read, evaluate, or assign them. The optimal length for UBC Press books is only a guideline, but accepted book proposals that are far above or below the suggested word count usually come with a recommendation to the author to adjust length accordingly.

Timeliness. Many scholarly books are necessarily written in retrospect to issues and events. However, whether a manuscript’s subject is in the news, is an ongoing issue, or represents the latest academic fashions, books that connect to ongoing issues are more hotly pursued.

Originality. Books that are the first of their kind, present a unique or pioneering argument, or synthesize areas in new ways, are noted by acquisitions editors. An indicator of the importance of originality is in the marketing of the finished book; many a UBC Press volume will advertise itself as “the first full-length study” on a particular subject.

Organization and structure of book’s argument. In most scholarly books, readers look for an overarching argument, purpose, or observation. This process may be helped along with the book information form, which asks the author to provide a one-sentence summary of the work. The editor evaluates the scholarly strength of a book based on the presentation of evidence and argument in the rest of the text.

Strength of proposal. The author’s success in presenting a convincing proposal can be a litmus test for his or her ability to express ideas. A disorganized, overly general, or poorly written proposal can cast a promising project in doubt. In one case, the director and editors agreed to request a completed introduction or sample chapter of the prospective manuscript because the quality of the proposal raised concerns about the author’s ability to clearly articulate arguments over an entire book.

Completeness and balance of argument, scholarship, and perspectives. Editors are quick to point out a seeming gap, missing perspective, or otherwise absent consideration in a book's line of inquiry. For example, a recent proposal exploring Canadian infrastructure projects' effects on local residents explored United Empire Loyalist traditions, but made no mention of First Nations or Acadian traditions despite their importance in the region. The proposal was accepted for review, but the editor was asked to note these omissions to the author.

The balance of theoretical and practical material is also a consideration. While every book approaches its subject differently, and different disciplines have varying general approaches, it is up to the editors to determine whether a submitted proposal has covered enough ground in each area.

Reputation of author. Senior or respected scholars, as well as those with a public profile, may have their reputations counted more heavily. Because their names have some caché, they are usually able to achieve higher sales than a new author. For this reason, a renowned scholar, or one with a saleable name, may be published even without financial support. Stephen Clarkson, who wrote *The Big Red Machine*, is an example; another is Desmond Morton, a renowned Canadian historian and author of *Fight or Pay*. Given its tight budget, however, the press will almost never get involved in a manuscript bidding war.⁶⁵

Previous experience with author. Authors who have previously published with UBC Press are noted. For example, Rod Preece has written a number of books on the history and philosophy of animal ethics, creating a one-author mini-list at the press. The level of scholarship in his work is consistently high, and he has been loyal to the press when he could

⁶⁵ Cullen, interview; Schmidt, interview.

publish with larger, more lucrative presses (one of his UBC Press books was co-published with Routledge). For these reasons, when ASPP funding for one of his books was in doubt, the editors and director decided to publish it even without funding. (The ASPP grant later came through.)⁶⁶ In another case, an author who had previously published with the press submitted a strong second proposal. Although the first book was reviewed well and the author's reputation in his field is sterling, the experience of working with him was so negative that the press was reluctant to accept this proposal.

These are among the factors that have been discussed when taking proposals into consideration at UBC Press acquisitions meetings. However, they are only the ones I have observed, and many more can factor in the publishing decision.

From acceptance at an editorial acquisitions meeting, it may take months or even years to receive the completed manuscript from the author. During this time, the ideas that were brought forth in the proposal have changed as the author has made progress. This, says Milroy, may lead to an unsatisfactory or inappropriate submission that requires major reworking, or may even face rejection. Communicating with the author between acceptance of a proposal for review and submission of a draft manuscript, he adds, can save time and effort on the part of both the author and the press.⁶⁷ This suggestion will be further explored in chapter 3.

⁶⁶ Schmidt, interview.

⁶⁷ Milroy, interview.

Rejections

A significant proportion of proposals, either complete submissions or casual inquiries, are rejected out of hand. Jean Wilson estimated that one-third of all inquiries result in immediate rejection, due chiefly to inappropriate subject matter, including inquiries about poetry and literary fiction.⁶⁸ The earlier a proposal is rejected in the acquisitions process, Wilson notes, the better, because this reserves the staff's valuable time and effort for accepted manuscripts. As noted earlier in this chapter, UBC Press places great emphasis on getting manuscripts published promptly, which requires all acquisitions and editorial-production staff to maximize the use of their time and resources.

In all rejections, the acquiring editor or director sends a letter politely declining to publish and usually recommending another publisher to approach. This helps maintain good editor-author relations, the importance of which is discussed on page 45.

Peer Review and the Publications Board

When the manuscript is submitted, it is read by three people: the acquisitions editor and two peer reviewers, or readers, who assess it for scholarly value, current relevance of the scholarship, and general fitness for publication. The mandated evaluation period of six weeks is shorter than in other presses because, as noted in “Pitching UBC Press to Authors” (page 23), the truncated publication timeline is part of UBC Press's strategy to attract authors; commitment to punctuality seems to express to authors that the press cares about the book, says Milroy. In practice, few reviewers meet the six-week limit for reading and

⁶⁸ Wilson, interview.

commenting on a manuscript; a more typical turnaround is eleven to twelve weeks.⁶⁹

However, the acquisitions editor is choosy about which peer reviewers he or she uses, and monitors the peer review period rigorously. A prestigious reader who consistently fails to meet deadlines would be unacceptable at UBC Press because of the time element.⁷⁰

What peer reviewers have to say about a manuscript is a major determinant in whether it is accepted for publication. Their assessments are recorded and used to determine a manuscript's fitness for publication, forming the core of the dossier that is submitted to both the UBC Press publications board, which approves all manuscripts for publication, and the CFHSS, which considers books for ASPP funding. Books with ecstatic reviews that are considered to incorporate groundbreaking scholarship are given higher precedence in most funding competitions. Thus, peer reviewer selection can make or break a book.

Choosing peer reviewers

Acquisitions editors generally take two weeks to seek out and reach agreements with reviewers to read a manuscript. Reviewers must be free of conflict of interest, and should have some reputation in the area of the manuscript they are evaluating. Moreover, a reader must maintain intellectual rigour but still be open to a manuscript's ideas; a known climate change skeptic would not be called upon to review a book that takes climate change as fact, for example. Some scholars simply do not make appropriate readers in any case, Wilson notes, for reasons such as mean-spiritedness, tardiness with deadlines, or unhelpful comments, among others.⁷¹ For her successor, Darcy Cullen, Wilson even compiled a list of

⁶⁹ Milroy, interview.

⁷⁰ Wilson, interview.

⁷¹ Ibid.

reviewers in her fields of acquisitions whom she doesn't recommend approaching. The practice of flagging readers whom experience has shown are inappropriate for particular manuscripts (or any manuscript) is commonplace, as noted by Judy Metro, formerly a Yale University Press editor.⁷²

One resource for potential peer reviewers is the author. The editor often asks the author to suggest reviewers, to give a sense of the types of scholars to use, as well as to identify scholars who have a conflict of interest or are otherwise unsuitable. Upon receipt, the editor vets these names for appropriateness and decides upon two reviewers.

Peer review feedback is based on the following questions:

1. What are the objectives and content of the manuscript? Are the objectives clear?
2. Is the scholarship sound? Is the author thoroughly acquainted with the literature on the subject? Does the manuscript as it stands make a significant original contribution to its field? How important is the subject?
3. To what audience is the manuscript directed? Would it serve only specialists in the field? Would you want this work in your personal library?
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? Would this manuscript benefit by being shortened or lengthened? If so, please suggest what might be condensed or expanded.
5. Is the organization of the manuscript sound and presented in a readable style? Are the author's techniques for handling notes, systems of citation, and bibliography sound? If included, do the illustrations, tables, graphs, charts, maps, photos, and appendices add to the manuscript?
6. Is the manuscript as it stands acceptable for publication? Please comment in detail, stating specifically yes, no, or not in its present form. If a revised manuscript may be publishable, please indicate clearly the nature of the revisions required.
7. How important is it that this work be published? Does this work duplicate or substantially recapitulate other works? Does it add to the scholarly debate in the field?
8. What is your overall recommendation? Is the manuscript:
 - (a) a very strong contribution to scholarship that should be published

⁷² Judy Metro, "Is It Publishable? The Importance of the Editorial Review," *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 26, 3 (April 1995), <http://www.proquest.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca>.

- (b) a strong contribution to scholarship that should be published, with the request that my suggestions for revision be considered
- (c) a contribution which, while modest, is interesting, and which can be recommended for publication
- (d) the manuscript should be revised and re-evaluated (along the lines of question 6 above)
- (e) no contribution to the field; not recommended for publication.⁷³

As noted in “Factors in Acquisitions Decisions” (page 33), UBC Press places strong emphasis on originality (#2, #7, #8), strength of scholarship (#2, #8), and organization and clarity (#1, #5). In addition, the breadth of the audience is considered (#3); this can help the editor determine the book’s sales and crossover potential. This list of questions also requests suggestions to improve the manuscript (#4, #6), emphasizing process. These questions are never changed from manuscript to manuscript. Such a practice may seem obvious, but this is not the case with, for example, Metro of Yale University Press, who tailors questions to get a desired response from a reader: “It is appropriate for the editor to voice his or her own agenda with the reader. For example, if I think the manuscript has course-book potential, I might ask the reader in my covering letter on comment on what, if anything would make it more valuable as a classroom text ... If the author’s notes seem excessive, I will ask the reader to comment on the balance of notes and text.”⁷⁴ One could call UBC Press’s procedures more “fair” than those at other presses, but the Yale example of how an editor’s choice of readers, among other decisions, can dramatically affect the fate of a manuscript.

After receiving peer review feedback, the author, with the acquisitions editor’s assistance, writes a formal response in which he or she addresses any difficulties, criticism, clarifications, or questions in the manuscript, or provides justifications or reasons why the

⁷³ “Questions for Peer Review,” internal document, UBC Press.

⁷⁴ Metro. According to the same article, Yale University Press also requires only one reader’s report.

manuscript should be left so. The press's basic strategy to request clear, cohesive revisions before resubmitting a manuscript is outlined in an internal document, "Main Steps to the Acquisitions Process": "Ask the author for an informal response. This will help you guide her/him in revisions ... When the revised [manuscript] is ready, ASK THE author to email a statement detailing revisions made – paying PARTICULAR attention to the points of intersection between reports [*emphasis in original*]."⁷⁵ A convincing response to one reader's criticisms may be sufficient to allow a strong manuscript to pass without revision, but if both readers point out the same issues, revisions are strongly suggested.

All manuscripts require two strong reports – at least two "B" ratings, from question #8 – to be accepted for publication. To give an author the opportunity to respond to criticisms and revise the manuscript, the two supporting readers' responses can come from one or two rounds of peer review. This document then becomes part of the manuscript's dossier, and the next step cedes control of the manuscript to the publications board.

The publications board

The board, which is currently made up of eleven scholars in the social sciences and humanities, and one in the sciences, gives final approval on whether to proceed with publication. (In general, says Milroy, UBC Press attempts to have at least one scholar on the board who does not work in the social sciences and humanities.) As the UBC Press self-study states, the publications board "authorizes but does not mandate publication, a role left to the discretion of the Press management so that it can consider financial and strategic

⁷⁵ "Main Steps to the Acquisitions Process," internal document, UBC Press.

factors before committing resources.”⁷⁶ In theory, this means that manuscripts receiving board approval can still be rejected; in practice, with the time and energy that has already been invested in the project, the director will almost always decide to publish. The most common reason for not publishing even after board approval is financial unviability, says Milroy.⁷⁷ The publications board itself is not expected to determine the financial implications of any project, or comment on its eligibility for funding.

Acquisitions editors attend board meetings but do not usually comment except to clarify any issues or answer questions. Their influence can be seen in the preparation of the manuscript’s dossier and assistance with the author in writing readers’ responses, but the decision is solely the board’s.

Editor-Author Relations

In large part, good acquisitions comes down to the quality of editorial experience that a press can offer its prospective authors. The first point of contact is the acquisitions editor, and, as noted in “Pitching UBC Press to Authors” on page 23, there is a strong emphasis on establishing good rapport with authors and assuring them of a good editorial experience.

Editor Gladys Topkis writes that “the cottage industry aspect of publishing – personal attention to books and authors and the involvement of the whole staff in the whole list – is most likely to be preserved in a professional/scholarly house, where the contribution of each book to the success of the list over time is significant and where relations with

⁷⁶ *UBC Press Review*, 18.

⁷⁷ Milroy, interview.

authors must be continually nurtured.”⁷⁸ Maintaining good editor-author relations in scholarly publishing, she argues, is more important than in trade publishing, even if that author isn’t published by the press. This is because “scholars have a network of their own, more tightly organized than the editors’. Just as a happy author or correspondent may produce leads to publishable manuscripts by others, so an unhappy one may discourage his friends from sending an editor their work or even from adopting a textbook published by the house.”⁷⁹ An acquisitions editor cannot work at the top of his or her profession, no matter how talented, if authors simply do not think to submit their manuscripts, or worse, avoid submitting them.

In addition, having special connections in a particular scholarly field gives an editor access to the *zeitgeist* and trends within that field. As noted in the section “Peer Review and the Publications Board” on page 40, an editor can later use these contacts as peer reviewers for a submitted manuscript – and a positive relationship with a reviewer can lead to a proposal submission. Editor-author relations could be more accurately termed editor-scholar relations to encompass the role of academics who are not writing books but who participate in the publishing process in other ways: as readers, as referrers of manuscripts from their colleagues, as customers and adopters, and as general champions of the press.

These relations can extend beyond editorial functions. Friendly contacts in the scholarly sphere can improve the reach of marketing efforts; they can even suggest new target markets and encourage course adoptions, improving sales figures. Because these contacts are often initiated at the acquisitions level, the efforts of acquisitions editors to build

⁷⁸ Gladys S. Topkis, “The Editor’s Job in Professional/Scholarly Publishing,” in Elizabeth A. Geiser, Arnold Dolin and Gladys S. Topkis (eds.), *The Business of Book Publishing: Papers by Practitioners* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), 79.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

good editor-author relations resonate through a press's entire operations, influencing its success in both scholarly and financial realms.

Funding

Reports of the demise of the scholarly book may be greatly exaggerated, but sales have declined, causing many university presses to pursue the trade market.⁸⁰ UBC Press, however, is committed to its mandate to publish scholarly books. In addition, successful publishing of trade books generally involves financial costs, human resources, and industry contacts that the press does not possess. The UBC Press self-study indicates that it has not found trade publishing particularly profitable, for various reasons including lower pricing, skyrocketing return rates, consumer advertising costs, and author travel, which can easily outweigh revenue:

Publishing popular books aimed primarily at trade markets, while often interesting and enjoyable for staff, has not been particularly rewarding for us financially. We watch our trade colleagues and fellow university presses that have strong trade orientations struggle to survive and realize this is not a magic bullet ... While we promote to the trade titles that have potential for broader audiences, ... we know that our strengths, editorially and promotionally, are in the academic sphere, and we choose what we publish with that clearly in mind. We believe that the primary *raison d'être* of a university press is to be a publisher of outstanding scholarly research.⁸¹

However, numerous scholarly books in UBC Press's list have successfully crossed over into the trade market. The recently published *Renegades: Canadians in the Spanish Civil War*

⁸⁰ Nadia Halim, "The New-Look Scholarly Press," *Quill and Quire* (November 1, 1998), http://www.quillandquiere.com/news/article.cfm?article_id=1232.

⁸¹ *UBC Press Review*, 12.

by Michael Petrou, the lead title for fall 2007, has sold 1,900 copies. Robert J. Muckle's *First Nations of British Columbia: An Anthropological Survey* has been successful in both course adoptions and as an introduction for general readers, with 6,200 copies sold. With scholarly integrity and peer oversight firmly in place, the press has accepted a proposal for a manuscript on indigenous peoples in Atlantic Canada that is modelled after Muckle's book.

University presses need to know that they can actually afford to publish a book they want to publish. At UBC Press, an average scholarly book costs \$34,000 CAD to produce from acquisition to production to marketing and distribution.⁸² As noted, a book without some supplementary funding has a far slimmer chance of being published. The UBC Press website acknowledges, in its "Publishing with UBC Press" section, that "few scholarly books in Canada can be published without financial assistance ... detailed cost-benefit analysis is done for all manuscripts under consideration ... to decide whether sufficient resources are available to take on the project." The site goes on to note that manuscripts containing previously published material, conference proceedings, and unrevised dissertations are ineligible for ASPP, and that "if ASPP is not involved, usually another source of funds in aid of publication is required."⁸³ Right up front, these guidelines indicate that money does indeed matter when publishing with a scholarly press.

UBC Press derives approximately 75 percent of its revenues from book sales. The remaining funds come from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences (CFHSS, the organizers of Congress); specialized academic societies and organizations; the

⁸² This is based on an overhead cost of \$22,000 per book (in turn, based on the press's yearly budget divided by number of books published per year), \$6,000 for prepress costs (including copy editing, typesetting, proofreading, and cover design), and \$6,300 for printing costs (based on an estimate from UBC Press's usual printer, Friesens, for a book with typical page count and print run). For more parameters of the printing costs, see Appendix III, page 89.

⁸³ "Publishing with UBC Press: Getting Your Manuscript Accepted."

Department of Canadian Heritage (DCH); the Association for the Export of Canadian Books (AECB); the Canada Council for the Arts; and the British Columbia Arts Council. Of these, DCH (through its Book Publishing Industry Development Program, or BPIDP) and AECB contribute block grants toward the overall operation of the press, rather than supporting individual titles, although both demand that UBC Press meet rigorous criteria to be eligible for these funds.

BPIDP has funded the large majority of Canadian publishers, and contributes greatly to UBC Press's operations. Year after year, it is a reliable source of funding, but the amounts it contributes fluctuate greatly. In 2002–03, it gave the press \$149,565; in 2003–04, it was up to \$123,778; in 2004–05, that amount again increased to \$145,443. While significant, this funding only makes up the overhead and direct costs of publishing for fewer than five books. Furthermore, while funding for distribution assistance was \$7 million for all publishers in 1993–94 (through the now-defunct Publications Distribution Assistance Program), it dwindled to zero in the mid-1990s before rising back up to \$4.1 million in 2002–03. This figure is not only significantly lower than it was a decade before, it is also distributed among a larger number of publishers.⁸⁴

The main source of external funding for individual titles is the CFHSS-administered ASPP, which is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), and is essentially the default place to start the quest for funding for any Canadian work of scholarship. Since April 2006, the ASPP has provided UBC Press with a fixed grant of \$8,000 per eligible title. This is an increase over the \$7,000 mandated beforehand; however,

⁸⁴ *Printed Matters: Book Publishing Industry Development Annual Report 2002–03, 2003–04, and 2004–05*, Book Publishing Policy and Program, (Ottawa: Canadian Heritage); *The Book Report: Book Publishing Industry Development Program Data, 1993.1994 to 2002.2003*, (Ottawa: Canadian Heritage, 2004).

ASPP funding was as high as \$9,000 in 1991, and was based on a variable model (so that more expensive books were eligible to receive more money) until federal government cuts in the mid- to late 1990s severely trimmed back the program budget.

In 2005, the ASPP budget was \$1 million distributed among 145 books, and it was still receiving around 300 applications each year; by 2007, it provided \$1.5 million to help fund 185 books (with 40 slots set aside for first-time authors), although the number of applications has also swelled in that time.⁸⁵ In cases where there is insufficient funding (which is essentially always), the ASPP will subject applications to competitive adjudication.

If UBC Press books do not secure ASPP funding, there are several other options. Scholars with SSHRC funding may be allocated a certain percentage that provides for communication or publication initiatives of their research. This money can be used toward publication of a scholarly monograph or edited volume; however, Milroy notes that many scholars use significant portions of these funds for other communications activities, such as attending conferences, before publication.⁸⁶ In addition, some universities, such as Simon Fraser University and the University of Western Ontario, provide a modicum of support for faculty members' publishing efforts. Such funds are more common in U.S. universities, which can help UBC Press publish American authors ineligible for ASPP funding. Other sources of funding are generally subject-dependent, such as funds from the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation (books on Chinese Studies in the social sciences and humanities), the Japan Foundation (Japanese studies), the International Centre for Canadian Studies (Canadian Studies), and the College Art Association (history of art and related subjects). In other

⁸⁵ Scott Wilson, "ASPP Gets Budget Boost: More Scholarly Books to be Funded, and More Money Given to Each," *Quill and Quire* (November 1, 2005), http://www.quillandquire.com/news/article.cfm?article_id=7476.

⁸⁶ Milroy, interview.

words, aid for Canadian publishers is available, but it varies from year to year based on title output for the year.

In 1995, the University of British Columbia ceased its \$200,000 yearly endowment to UBC Press, and stopped funding its warehousing operations, worth an additional \$60,000 per year. In its place, UBC Press began receiving an annual grant from its parent institution in the name of K.D. Srivastava, former UBC Vice-President (Student and Academic Services) and member of the press's publications board. The grant of \$49,500 helps publish books by authors or volume editors who have completed a large proportion of their to-be-published research at UBC as faculty members, post-doctoral researchers, or graduate students. This funding is technically a scholarly book prize, but in practice it is used more as an operating fund for books originating in UBC research.⁸⁷

UBC Press has continued to pursue funding from its host university, much in the style of American university presses, or other Canadian university presses. (This was, in fact, one of the motivations for writing the *UBC Press Review: Self-Study 2007*.) Of its two main competitors, University of Toronto Press exists as a separate entity and owns the U of T Bookstore, which provides minimum transfers of \$750,000 to its publishing operations, and McGill-Queen's receives \$350,000 annually from its parent universities. UBC Press received no operating grant of equivalent magnitude until 2008, when the press competed successfully for a \$150,000 grant from the University of British Columbia, renewable annually subject to the university's budget.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ *UBC Press Review*, 62; Cairns, 16–17.

⁸⁸ *UBC Press Review*, 62; Milroy, interview.

Competition for Manuscripts

Most university presses across North America have staked out territories of specialization and acquire most vigorously in those areas. As a leading publisher in numerous areas of social science and humanities scholarship, UBC Press is often the first stop for scholars wanting to publish in subject areas such as political science, law, environmental studies, and military history. Competition still exists for manuscripts in popular, lucrative disciplines such as Canadian history, First Nations studies, and anthropology, and for proposed series based on research from multi-collaborator initiatives.

Not surprisingly, larger university presses are more inclined to offer special inducements to gain the manuscripts they want, according to a 1999 survey of American university presses.⁸⁹ Such inducements may take the form of generous advances or fewer initial requirements from the proposal. Canadian scholarly presses are generally not in a position to financially sweeten any acquisitions deals; for UBC Press editors, competing for manuscripts means quickening response time, improving their level of service to authors, and broadcasting the press's long-term advantages to authors. A high level of scholarship is still required at all university presses and will not be sacrificed in the name of winning competitions; this would be counterproductive if it results in an inferior book.

List-Building, Strategy, and the Importance of Series

Every book acquired by UBC Press editors is considered not only on its own merits, but also for the way it complements UBC Press's list. Whether by strategy or by chance, acquisitions

⁸⁹ Barbara Jones, "Changing Author Relationships and Competitive Strategies of University Publishers," *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 31, 1 (January 1999): 3–19.

editing is an activity that builds upon itself. As a press builds a critical mass of books in particular areas, it may develop a reputation in those areas, leading to more submissions. Strategic acquisition is of especial concern to UBC Press, which was reborn by focusing on areas of strength while dropping other fields in which it had traditionally published. It is only natural for university presses to develop series to further boost their reputations in particular fields.

As noted in chapter 1, university presses develop and maintain book series because of their inherent list-building potential: quality acquisitions, showcased in a series, can attract exciting scholarship and respected authors. Lesley Erickson discusses series at UBC Press thoroughly in her Master of Publishing project report, “One Thing After Another,” and I will discuss series only as they pertain to acquisitions.

In developing a long-lasting and respected series at a university press, a good general editor is desirable, particularly in the beginning stages. The general editor represents the series, recruits colleagues old and new as potential authors, and consults on quality of scholarship and subareas in the series, depending on their level of involvement. As Erickson notes, “Unlike an established scholar who can tap into that network of contacts built over the span of a career to acquire manuscripts, it can take a number of years for an acquisitions editor to make themselves known to scholars in a discipline and convince them to entrust their manuscripts to a new series at a Press without an established list in the subject area.”⁹⁰ The general editor’s prestige can rub off on an associated acquisitions editor. For example, Peter Milroy persuaded W. Wesley Pue, a respected law scholar who had written the UBC Press-published *Pepper In Our Eyes*, to act as general editor for the Law and Society series,

⁹⁰ Lesley Erickson, “One Thing After Another: Book Series and Navigating the Crisis in Scholarly Publishing – A Case Study,” Master of Publishing project report, Simon Fraser University (2007): 38.

and Pue became one of the driving forces in building the press's law list. Randy Schmidt, the law acquisitions editor, has taken advantage of Pue's influence and vast network of contacts, and is now a leading acquisitions editor in that field in Canada with his own network and reputation among scholars, even as Pue's role in the series has diminished in recent years.⁹¹

Although it was Milroy and then Schmidt who developed the Law and Society series, in other cases it is the general editor who envisions the shape of a series. For example, Graeme Wynn, a University of British Columbia environmental historian and UBC Press board member, proposed that the press create its own environmental history series, modelled after University of Washington Press's Weyerhaeuser Environmental Books. The press accepted his proposal, and the result was the Nature | History | Society series, with Schmidt as acquiring editor, which includes the award winners *The Archive of Place*, *Hunters at the Margin*, and *States of Nature*. Wynn is active in the editing process of this series, and he writes the foreword for each volume.

Series also present opportunities to partner with other organizations, which not only have the reach to attract manuscripts, but may provide monetary support. For example, Emily Andrew's acquisition of several successful military history titles led her to propose a collaboration with the Canadian War Museum on a series on military history in Canada, a field in which no scholarly press has published significantly. The result was the Studies in Canadian Military History series, co-published by the Canadian War Museum, with Dean Oliver, the museum's director of research and exhibitions, serving as general editor. This collaboration also secured funding for books in the series: each volume receives \$5,000 in co-financing from the museum, in addition to other grants.⁹²

⁹¹ Erickson, 36; Schmidt, interview.

⁹² Erickson, 32.

As was the case with Schmidt and the Law and Society series, Andrew's acquisitions skills opened the door to creating a series on military history. Her acquisition of a respected general editor with public clout did much of the heavy lifting in attracting promising new manuscripts in that area.

Another model for series production is to collaborate with another institution on publishing a set number of books. These are usually proposed by the prospective series editor or editors, whose aim is to publish research results from a multi-collaborator initiative. Because these series often have respected scholars attached to the initiative, and because funding for communication projects is built into the proposal, there is greater incentive for a press to collaborate on publishing a series with them. Former Princeton University Press editorial board member Robert Darnton observed this phenomenon a quarter-century ago when he wrote, "Don't submit a book. Submit a series ... as far as I know we have never turned down a series, and we took on a half dozen during my four years on the board."⁹³ Such "submitted" series at UBC Press include the Canadian Democratic Audit (nine volumes, from research at the project of the same name at Mount Allison University), Equality | Security | Community (three volumes, from the Equality, Security and Community Project), and the ongoing Globalization and Autonomy series (ten planned volumes, from McMaster University's eponymous initiative). Not only have books in these series sold well thanks to their origins in prestigious initiatives, but they have also "received substantial series funding that obviates the need to depend on or even apply to ASPP."⁹⁴

In other cases, series have not paid dividends proportional to the effort required to create and maintain them. For example, Laura Macleod helped develop a Sexuality Studies

⁹³ Robert Darnton, "A Survival Strategy for Academic Authors," *American Scholar* 54, 4 (Autumn 1983): 533–37.

⁹⁴ *UBC Press Review*, 62.

series, but after much initial interest, few proposals were submitted. Furthermore, previous books in the series have dealt partly with comparative literature, a moribund area in UBC Press's complement, and manuscripts in that area may have been acquired by more literature-oriented presses.⁹⁵ Still, recent acquisitions in sexuality studies may revive the series over the next few years. As Wilson notes, series can help direct and develop a press's list, but they add a layer of complexity to the publishing process and are not always worth doing.⁹⁶

Conclusion

Stripped to the bare bones, acquisitions editing in scholarly publishing is a highly structured process. A proposal must meet an invisible list of requirements for the editorial team to pursue it further. Although the acquisitions editors and the director comment on different aspects of each proposal before them, common concerns on scholarly integrity, available funding, originality, manuscript length, and crossover into different disciplines and markets, among other things, tend to emerge. For the most significant criteria – compatibility with UBC Press's list, strength of scholarship, funding – there is little room for negotiation. Peer reviewers are given the same benchmarking questions to evaluate the level of scholarship in each manuscript, which must find approval with both them and the publications board.

Within this rigid framework, however, there is ample room for creativity and entrepreneurship. Acquisitions editors at UBC Press go to the same academic conferences every year, including the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, but they also find manuscripts through cold calls and scholarly publishing informational tours through

⁹⁵ Erickson, 28.

⁹⁶ Wilson, interview.

Canadian universities. The selection of the right peer reviewers requires resourcefulness and perceptiveness, and employs an editor's knowledge of the field as well as effective use of professional networks. Competition for manuscripts requires editors to deploy tenacity, tact, and persuasive abilities not only to acquire the manuscripts they want, but also to maintain good relations with colleagues at competing university presses and the scholarly community at large. And finally, building the list and developing a robust publishing strategy help the entire press strike the right balance between breadth and depth in areas in which it publishes.

Among Canadian scholarly presses, there are significant gulfs between the conclusions in literature and in practice – particularly in the area of funding and title subventions, which are hardly mentioned in scholarly literature – but the entrepreneurial and personal aspects of acquisitions editing do stymie attempts to package it into convenient theory or a course. Education, analysis, and reporting in the literature are useful, but acquisitions editing is chiefly informed by practice and experience. How these elements can be combined into a useful framework to build upon UBC Press's strengths and improve upon its weaknesses will be examined in chapter 3.

3

**The Future of Acquisitions
at UBC Press**

With firm footing in the context of acquisitions editing in scholarly publishing obtained from literature and educational materials, and knowledge of UBC Press's operations as they pertain to acquisitions, one can develop strategies to meet present and future challenges. The press's 2007 self-study identifies several areas that require extra attention or may pose threats in the future. This chapter explores numerous areas that may have a significant impact on UBC Press's future, and the chapter addresses possible solutions and strategies to deal with challenges and assist in achieving goals.

As an industry, scholarly publishing in the social sciences and humanities has been declared to be in a state of emergency for the last twenty years. Factors such as shrinking library budgets, changing audiences for scholarly books, the rise of the mega-bookstore oligopoly in Canada, and an increasingly influential medium of internet-based commerce and information access pose continuing challenges for all university presses. These non-specific challenges and threats will be addressed as they relate to UBC Press's goals, but will not be discussed on their own.

Challenges and Change at UBC Press

The size of UBC Press's list, number of staff, prestige of the imprint, areas of strength and specialization, and general strategy have undergone revolutionary changes – virtually all for the better – in the less than two decades since the 1990 overhaul. Although few current staff members were employed by the press in 1990, the overhaul and refocus still informs the press's continued efforts toward improvement. This spirit has manifested itself in internal working documents such as the *UBC Press Review: Self-Study 2007*, a comprehensive analysis of the press's activities and a steering document in formulating future strategy for the press.

It is instructive to examine the press's major challenges in the editorial-acquisitions department as articulated in the self-study. The first three are:

1. We confront daily the difficulties involved in trying to increase the number of titles that we have set as our goal. We are limited financially in our ability to add new staff, which means that individual editors face ever-increasing pressure to bring in more books. Yet the attributes that have led to our growth over the past seventeen years – our personal touch and commitment to timeliness, our sharply focused list, our community outreach activities – are clearly threatened by the imperative to produce more books with the same number of staff.
2. Our ability to acquire more books in our main areas is declining. For the Press to increase its title output significantly, new areas of publication will have to be pursued. Yet it is unlikely that an untapped area akin to law and society exists, which means that we will probably be competing directly with other Canadian university presses over the same books. Careful research and a well-thought-out strategy are essential for success.
3. Resource constraints inhibit our ability to commission textbooks, do market analysis of sales in different disciplines, and analyze our own processes to see where things are working and where they are not. Indeed, the limited editorial assistance available means that valuable acquisitions time is lost doing clerical work that could easily be done by an assistant editor.⁹⁷

As pointed out earlier in this project report, the “personal touch and commitment to timeliness” that the press’s acquisitions team brings to its authors are among its major selling points. These personal benefits are always raised with prospective authors in making a case to publish with UBC Press. The point at which growth becomes a liability no doubt describes a fine balance, and the question has become even more difficult to resolve since the writing of this report began: Darcy Cullen has succeeded Jean Wilson, and Emily Andrew has gone on leave and Randy Schmidt is handling her acquisitions files and in-process manuscripts in addition to his regular files.

⁹⁷ *UBC Press Review: Self-Study 2007*. UBC Press and the University of British Columbia, March 2007, 28-29. Numbers have been added to facilitate referencing to each challenge.

One suggested solution, noted in #3, would be to increase the “limited editorial assistance” by adding human or technological resources, such as an editorial assistant, a common position at both scholarly and trade publishers. Added resources to perform clerical work, manage author relations, analyze sales data, apply for funding and grants, and track and manage information would free up acquisitions editors to turn their attentions to their files as well as to set goals and develop publishing strategy, components of challenge #2. If these resources took the form of an editorial assistant, some succession planning could also be undertaken. This is, in fact, an issue identified in challenge #4 in the self-study:

4. The department needs to plan carefully for the imminent departure of the senior member of the department – Jean Wilson who will retire in July 2008. A replacement strategy needs to be developed over the next twelve months to ensure that this retirement does not cause any loss of momentum.⁹⁸

Although Wilson’s succession by Darcy Cullen in August 2008 has been successful, an editorial assistant position would provide another avenue for on-the-job training for a future acquisitions editor.

The other challenges identified in the self-study are:

5. Our dependence on external sources of funding (primarily the ASPP) also impacts our ability to increase the number of titles published. We are continually competing with other presses over scarce subsidy resources, with the inevitable result that some worthy scholarly books are not being published. A separate, discretionary avenue of funding would almost certainly result in the Press publishing an additional five to ten books a year.
6. Though this becomes less significant with each passing year, our geographic location on the West Coast and our poor pre-1990 reputation also affect our ability to acquire new titles. The two main presses in central Canada – University of Toronto Press and McGill-Queen’s University Press – remain “default” options for many scholars. We have

⁹⁸ *UBC Press Review*, 29.

made significant strides to overcome this difficulty and to raise the profile of the “new” UBC Press, but additional resources need to be committed to this task.

Challenge #5, funding for scholarly books, is common to all Canadian university presses, particularly smaller ones. Discretionary funds would likely come from a press’s home institution, although universities often need corporate partnerships and sponsorships to accomplish their infrastructural goals. As UBC Press is already short-staffed, there would hardly be the human resources or budget to take on a major independent fundraising effort. However, such an effort may be feasible if the press were to utilize the fundraising infrastructure already in place at its home institution, such as its alumni affairs and development office. The press would undoubtedly have to justify the scholarly value it adds to the University of British Columbia’s reputation; it could make a case that publishing in the academic areas in which the university is known would be symbiotic. UBC Press has strong lists in First Nations studies, law, and political science, disciplines in which the university also excels.

Such an effort to boost funding would help tackle challenge #6, the press’s acquisitions ability as compared to its larger competitors. UBC Press has its strengths, but it is doubtful that it can ever challenge the supremacy of presses that publish so many more titles every year. (Toronto puts out 150 to 160, and McGill-Queen’s 110, compared to UBC Press’s 60.) At the same time, efforts to “catch up” for the sake of catching up run counter to the press’s strategy of focused acquisitions and controlled growth in key areas. Future assessments could be revised to reflect a more balanced approach, as acquisitions activity increases in selected new fields as well as in the press’s areas of specialization.

As for the aforementioned problem of geography, having a Toronto presence in Melissa Pitts has already boosted the press's visibility and ability to acquire significantly. However, as she is only a half-time editor, the press's list may benefit further by expanding its acquisitions activities in central Canada, either by transferring Pitts's other duties to a new staff member, or by creating another position in Toronto – both of which, of course, require greater funds. Furthermore, any growth in acquisitions must not come at the cost of UBC Press's traditional strengths in the editorial process, which could compromise editor-author relations and hurt the press's reputation among scholars.

The press's goals for the editorial-acquisitions department for 2007 to 2010 are to:

1. Continue to work toward increasing the number of books published to seventy to seventy-five titles by 2010. This increase will be accomplished through further expansion in our current areas of strength and incursions into new, carefully selected and researched areas.
2. Consider adding staff resources (such as an editorial assistant), which would increase the per-title productivity of acquisitions editors.
3. Continue to increase the profile of UBC Press in other parts of the country through outreach activities.⁹⁹

The first two challenges have been addressed in this chapter. The third is only partially addressed by Pitts's presence in Toronto. A relatively inexpensive way to reach scholars and audiences in remote areas could be via the internet, a medium that UBC Press has not used very effectively so far: the press's website is set up for e-commerce but is old-fashioned, contains dead links, and lacks so-called Web 2.0 technologies such as RSS feeds. Bringing some outreach activities to the internet could raise the press's profile at relatively low cost.

For example, as noted in chapter 2, one of UBC Press's outreach activities is the travelling informational session on the scholarly publishing process given by acquisitions

⁹⁹ *UBC Press Review*, 30.

editors. This multi-university tour has fallen by the wayside in recent years because of increased acquisitions loads. The press could produce a video of these informational sessions at relatively low cost and post it on the web, potentially reaching scholars who cannot attend the real-life sessions. A video could be produced and optimized for search engines, and would provide website visitors with a more memorable experience of the UBC Press website, making them more likely to keep the press top of mind in the future. This is only one example of ways in which internet use can enhance UBC Press's outreach efforts.

Emerging Areas in UBC Press's List

The press's second challenge, to acquire more books per year and to choose the fields in which to acquire them, is faced by all Canadian presses. Publishers face some degree of competition in all major disciplines, so UBC Press must carefully choose the fields where it will build or rebuild a list.

The press has made some headway in various subject areas. Among these, transnationalism and environmental history are touted as emerging areas of scholarship that could grow in scope. UBC Press already has an excellent start in environmental history with its acclaimed Nature | History | Society series, which has featured numerous award-winning titles. Narrower niche areas, such as the aforementioned history of nursing, may seem too focused to be formally pursued, but this can depend on the acquisitions editor's feel for scholarly fashions and the level of scholarship in that area.

As with the Studies in Canadian Military History series, it is likely that an area of specialization would emerge organically, after the press publishes a critical mass of books in the same field over several seasons, editors link proposed manuscripts to the published

works in that field, and scholars submit related proposals to the press based on its burgeoning reputation.

In chapter 2, this report examined the “submitted” series model, in which UBC Press essentially becomes the publishing partner for a preplanned number of volumes. This model is attractive for having built-in funding and production consistencies that can make the publishing process more efficient. For example, the Canadian Democratic Audit has cemented UBC Press’s reputation in one of its strength areas, political science. It could also be a worthwhile risk to pursue submitted series in the press’s areas of emerging rather than established strength, as is the case with the Globalization and Autonomy series, which contains elements of political science but encompasses numerous other fields in its interdisciplinary approach. Such a practice is dependent on whether these initiatives continue to receive funding for book publishing activities, and whether they employ any senior scholars who can serve as appropriate series editors or advocates of communicating their research.

Workflow, Integration, and Technology

UBC Press has already expressed its aversion to dipping fully into trade publishing. However, Kate Wittenberg, Ithaka project director and former Columbia University Press editor-in-chief, argues that the scholarly monograph in its current form is endangered, partly because scholars are getting their information in different ways. Increasingly, students and scholars use technology that not only cuts down the need for multiple copies of the same book, but also moulds the way information is presented.

UBC Press must ensure that the scholarly monograph, its bread and butter, continues to fulfil the needs of scholars and interested readers while still maintaining the depth, logic, and art of sustained argument that characterizes the form. Publishers themselves are in no danger, Wittenberg asserts, unless they remain stuck in the paradigms of the past:

The traditional skills that scholarly-book editors have brought to their work remain as valuable as ever. Identifying, reviewing, and editing the best scholarly work are still very much needed. However, because the traditional forms in which we have published that material may no longer be as relevant as they were in the past, editors must learn as much as possible about our users – how scholars now do their research; read content; use archives, images, data, and technology; and exercise their preferences for gaining access to their materials.¹⁰⁰

Wittenberg goes on to argue for a more integrated publishing model, where departments cross-pollinate to come up with fresh ideas to appeal more strongly to the end user:

In the new organizational model, editors will develop content for publication in both print and digital form and will play a role in its organization and design; technologists will participate in planning the navigation of content and in designing products that fit users' needs; production and design staff members will collaborate with authors and provide expertise on content organization and narrative structure. And marketing and sales departments will be involved in all decisions regarding content organization, functionality, product design, and access-and-dissemination mechanisms, so that they can work closely in developing effective relationships with customers.¹⁰¹

Readers of Wittenberg's prescriptions undoubtedly have many reservations about them. Marketing and sales influencing content could dilute or even endanger scholarship, for example, or production and design staff may be more concerned with aesthetics than depth

¹⁰⁰ Kate Wittenberg, "Scholarly Editing in the Digital Age," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49, 41 (June 20, 2003), <http://chronicle.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/weekly/v49/i41/41b01201.htm>.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

and organization. However, a clear strategy to integrate the university press's departments can create a final product that is better suited to a scholarly audience in transition. For example, an acquisitions editor may see something distinctive in a manuscript that may appeal to scholars in a particular field, but if this knowledge is not transferred to other departments, an opportunity to more effectively market the book may be lost.

As Milroy notes, the publishing profession is naturally compartmentalized; most people who work in publishing are drawn to one area of specialization, and this pattern resists smooth integration.¹⁰² At UBC Press, there has been some interdepartmental integration. For example, marketing staff members are invited to transmittal meetings – where a manuscript is transferred from editorial-acquisitions to editorial-production – to begin building ideas for a more strategic marketing plan. In addition, editorial-production and marketing staff have collaborated on a copy form that transforms inputted information into tagged XML text and file links. This facilitates the transfer of book-related data (including title, ISBN, price, jacket copy, and cover images) from acquisitions to production to marketing, where they can easily be used to create catalogues, library notices, web pages, and other marketing materials. While such activities can increase efficiency, there is currently little managerial oversight to ensure they are followed up properly; for example, one of the creators of the copy form noted that she did not know when information in the form would be posted to the web, or how exactly it would be used. More discussion will help ensure that further strategic integration of departments will work to the press's advantage.

All authors approached, and manuscripts and proposals at any stage are tracked through a database maintained by the assistant to the director. This can be a useful tool to

¹⁰² Peter Milroy, interview by author, March 6, 2009.

develop a future editorial program, allowing acquiring editors, the director, and other staff to see what books may be forthcoming. In practice, however, few staff look at this information; there is no mandate to do so, and delivery dates for proposals and manuscripts are so unpredictable that it is impossible to say whether a manuscript will be accepted, much less arrive on time, much less mesh with other books in UBC Press's list. However, Milroy says that integrating all data about proposals and manuscripts – including those in review and pre-review stages – into a centralized information package could facilitate smoother workflow and better planning. Further, he notes, many manuscripts drastically change shape between acceptance of a proposal and submission of a first draft – often becoming a text far removed from the press's expectations. This poses many problems if the manuscript is no longer appropriate for publication. Tracking authors and their progress during this “in-between” stage may help acquisitions editors keep a tighter rein on their projects, saving valuable time and resources for both the press and the author. Over time, Milroy adds, information about how many proposals or manuscripts are at each stage can be used to estimate how many books will be ready for publication at any given time, helping to set acquisitions and transmittal goals.¹⁰³

Both interdepartmental integration and acquisitions workflow can be addressed with some technological tools being implemented at UBC Press. A central database system created by the publishing software company Klopotek, while mainly focused on editorial-production, could benefit other aspects of the publishing process. The system features an “enter once, propagate everywhere” functionality that facilitates the flow of information from editorial-acquisitions to other departments. The setup of this information system also affords the entire press the opportunity to further integrate departments for more efficient

¹⁰³ Ibid.

information flow. The searchability feature would help make files easier to find, and the system's centralized nature would make data available to all staff members – especially important for the editorial-acquisitions department, as three of the four editors work off-site.

The Klopotek system also includes a scheduling module that can be applied to acquisitions. This module could help editors keep track of the status of manuscript proposals, deadlines for peer reviewers, and grant applications. Furthermore, learning a new system may encourage editors – and the staff at large – to keep the press's larger strategic concerns front of mind, and make better overall sense of UBC Press's workflow. Because all the data is already entered into the system, benchmarking and goal tracking would be easier to accomplish.

Another tool, a dynamic sales database, which was previously suggested by Randy Schmidt and Jean Wilson, is now in place. As a UBC Press intern, one of my first tasks was to develop an interim static sales database of books published in the last five years. The end product had severe limitations in both temporal scope (the available data ended in early 2008) and its static nature. However, a more recent database, with information provided directly by UBC Press's distributor, University of Toronto Press, gives dynamic sales data over a lifetime, broken down by month. This provides not only a more complete picture of a particular book's life cycle, but can also capture the re-emergence of any backlist books into the frontlist, and take advantage of "long tail" sales. The database can also help determine emerging scholarly trends, guiding editors toward manuscripts with greater sales and course adoptions. While still in its infancy, it has the potential to make the acquisitions process smoother and allow editors to concentrate on the more creative duties in the publishing process.

Conclusion

While threatened by declining sales of scholarly monographs and increasing costs, the press continues to attract authors based on a sterling reputation for good editor-scholar relations and a high level of service and scholarship, characteristics that will likely help the press weather the storm of technology and a changing readership.

As can be seen in its self-study, UBC Press is very aware of the challenges it faces, particularly those related to resource constraints. It recognizes that its strengths in personal relationships with authors and a focused editorial-acquisitions team could be threatened by the imperative to publish more books and devote resources to sales and strategic analysis. Suggested solutions to these challenges – more human and technological resources dedicated to assisting acquisitions editors, utilization of university fundraising infrastructure, development of a greater presence in central Canada to boost acquisitions, expansion of internet-based communication and outreach activities – are all contingent upon the availability of greater financial and human resources, itself a central challenge to the press.

Other avenues to making greater use of existing resources, such as sharpened focus on emerging disciplines, must be examined with a critical eye. However, UBC Press has already worked toward a more organized workflow and increased interdepartmental integration. The development of a sales database and continuing implementation of the Klopotek database system could help streamline acquisitions and other processes, and reframe the press's activities in a more integrated context. Despite its many challenges and uncertainty both within the organization and in the industry at large, UBC Press is a forward-thinking institution whose main strengths – rigorous scholarship and editorial quality,

excellent editor-scholar relations, and high production values – will carry it far into the publishing future.

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Appendix 1: Survey of Canadian Scholarly Publishers

Questions and results of an informal survey of acquisitions editors for Canadian scholarly publishers attending the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences

	How many years has your press been at Congress?	How many acquisitions editors are attending Congress?	How many "serious" manuscript discussions have you had this Congress?
Canadian Scholars' Press Inc. (and Women's Press)	don't know	1	4 to 5
Wilfrid Laurier University Press	since antiquity	1 (out of 3 total)	30 to 35
Athabasca University Press	1 (first year)	2	~20
University of Alberta Press	30 years	1	~30
Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina	1 (first year back after hiatus)	1	13
McGill-Queen's University Press	since antiquity	1 out of 3 (Queen's), 2 out of 2 (McGill)	~50 (10 per day)
University of Toronto Press	since antiquity	6 out of 8	8 meetings in 2 days
UBC Press	since antiquity	4 out of 4	don't know
Black Rose	since 1970	2 out of 3	don't know
Broadview Press	22	2	17
Emond Montgomery Publications Ltd.	3 (no book display until this year, UP program only 3 years old)	1	8

Appendix 1: Survey of Canadian Scholarly Publishers (cont.)

	What proportion of these are author-initiated?	What solicitation tools do you have here?	How many books does your press annually?
Canadian Scholars' Press Inc. (and Women's Press)	5 out of 13	a "send proposals to" information on web site	less than 10
Wilfrid Laurier University Press	20% initiated by author	pamphlet with web site for author guidelines	28 to 30
Athabasca University Press	don't know	pamphlet with web site for author guidelines	15 to 20 (by end of 2008)
University of Alberta Press	don't know	pamphlet with web site for author guidelines	30
Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina	11 out of 13	pamphlet with web site for author guidelines	8 to 10
McGill-Queen's University Press	don't know	submission guidelines booklet	90 to 120
University of Toronto Press	mostly by authors	submission guidelines booklet	160 +
UBC Press	mostly by authors	catalogues, business cards, brochures	~60
Black Rose	50% / 50%	hard copy guidelines	6 to 10
Broadview Press	English: 60 - 70%; philosophy: 50%	catalogues; gathered business cards and e-mailed guidelines	~40
Emond Montgomery Publications Ltd.	20% initiated by author	books, catalogues, promo postcards, sales sheets, testimonials, proofs; held wine&cheeselaunch for 2 companion volumes	8 university + 24 high school/law school/college

Appendix 2: Case Studies

Descriptions of manuscript acquisitions meetings attended between June and

November 2008

A RECENT SUBMISSION was an edited volume of more than ten articles about the physical geography of Ontario and the paleontology of prehistoric Aboriginal peoples. The volume was viewed as too general, more of a museum handbook or popular introduction to the archaeology of a particular area than a scholarly work. Thus, it was not viewed as original research and would probably fail to qualify for ASPP funding. The project was also unattached to other funding sources such as a museum. In addition, its main subject, archaeology, has not been one of UBC Press's traditional strength areas; a previous series, *Pacific Rim Archaeology*, had realized mediocre sales and was deemed too technical to cross over as a trade book, leading to the general assertion that "archaeology books don't sell." This proposal was therefore rejected.

A SUBMITTED PROPOSAL concerns the challenges of Aboriginal-state relations in Canada. Examining governance at various levels, it compares intergovernmental relations to current theoretical frameworks on Aboriginal federalism. UBC Press has published successfully and abundantly in this field, with titles such as *Navigating Neoliberalism, Aboriginal Autonomy and Development in Northern Quebec and Labrador*, *Hunters and Bureaucrats* (which has sold nearly 1,000 copies and won the Julian Steward Book Prize from the American Anthropological Association), and *Citizens Plus* (which was shortlisted for two prizes and sold over 1,200 copies).¹⁰⁴ As a result, UBC Press has developed an excellent reputation in the field of Canadian Aboriginal-state relations and governance. In addition, the book is based on a PhD dissertation supervised by three professors who had recently co-edited a well-received volume on comparative Canadian politics; their approval offered some assurance that the submitted manuscript would contain substantial, high-quality scholarship. The proposal was accepted.

A RECENT ACQUISITION looks at the interrelationships among outdoor recreation, the environment and ecopolitics. As the author is a Canadian citizen and his proposed manuscript is based on a PhD dissertation undertaken at UBC, the project is eligible for both ASPP and K.D. Srivastava funding, making it more financially appealing to publish. In addition, the author noted in his submission that the proposed book would be a natural fit for UBC Press's Nature | History | Society series, which comprises several award-winning books – including *Hunters and Bureaucrats* – and is establishing the press as a leader in the burgeoning field of environmental history. This field is also growing in the U.S., expanding the book's potential market. The book additionally crosses over into the growing discipline

¹⁰⁴ All numbers of copies sold taken from UBC Press Cognos Sales History Database, accessed October 8, 2008.

of the history and sociology of sport, and could hold local interest, as the research is based in BC and taps into the province's outdoor recreation culture. The proposal was accepted.

A MANUSCRIPT was proposed about Canadian foresting policy from the 1960s to 1990s, co-authored by several Canadian senior scholars. The proposal noted that no comprehensive nationwide study of provincial forest policies has ever been published, and that it would be the first book to explore its subject since 1990. The book would complement UBC Press's significant backlist on forestry policy, environmental policy and resource management, which includes *Canadian Natural Resource and Environmental Policy*, a bestselling book that has been adopted into several courses and has gone into a second edition. The book is also eligible for both ASPP and K.D. Srivastava funding. The major concern with the book is that the main text of the manuscript is only 57,000 words, which is very short and could be seen as a poor value for the typical monograph prices of \$85 for a hardcover or \$29.95 for a paperback. However, it was noted that a short book is easier to sell than a very long one, and it would be more likely to be adopted in a graduate or senior undergraduate course. The proposal was accepted, with a caveat to review the length of the manuscript when it is submitted.

A PROPOSED MANUSCRIPT about the Sri Lankan diaspora and its cultural and political manifestations in Canada, in particular on how the nation's post-9/11 security measures affect the Sri Lankan-Canadian community. It is a co-authored volume that will total 100,000 words and is explicitly aimed at a multidisciplinary audience with interests in transnationalism, migration, and security studies. Despite some difficulties in understanding the rationale behind the structure of the book's main argument, it was praised for its timeliness, for exploring the little-studied Sri Lankan community in Canada, and because transnationalism is becoming a fashionable and cutting-edge sub-discipline in sociology and anthropology. The book was recommended for acquisition.

A PROPOSAL FOR A MANUSCRIPT about governing Canada in the "Age of Terror" was submitted. The manuscript examines post-9/11 security arrangements in Canada through the lens of the politics of security in western liberal democracies, particularly in Europe, and to what extent this framework has come to govern citizens. The subject is timely, but the book was also flagged for its short length and, based on its proposal, for its emphasis on theory where; the editors believe that a practical, real-world analysis would prove more interesting to the target audience. The proposal was approved.

A MANUSCRIPT about the ties between land and identity of indigenous peoples of British Columbia was proposed. The book would appeal to legal scholars, particularly those dealing with Aboriginal lands in Canada or elsewhere, and could have adoption potential in advanced undergraduate courses on First Nations in BC. The proposal itself was short and somewhat unfocused, about one-quarter of the typical proposal length, and only indicated the titles of its six chapters, not the contents. While it deals with an important subject that would fit naturally into UBC Press's list, there is already ample scholarly literature on B.C.'s Aboriginal peoples, and specifically how Native beliefs have clashed with western "rational" models in the context of treaty processes and Aboriginal rights. Furthermore, the book's proposed length was on the short side at only 75,000 words. It was suggested that this could

be a “big” book on B.C. First Nations, unifying theory and case studies into a larger picture. Its complementarity with UBC Press’s list, it was decided, outweighed some of the weaknesses. Therefore, it was decided that the acquisitions editor would request a more directed proposal that elaborated on chapter contents before acceptance.

A PROPOSED MANUSCRIPT would examine how twentieth-century infrastructure “megaprojects” in Canada, such as the St. Lawrence Seaway and nuclear generating stations, have affected local residents and the environments around them. The manuscript consists of six case studies, including reworked versions of previously published journal articles, with a framing introduction and conclusion. The author is a well-regarded scholar in geography and the proposed book would fit well into UBC Press’s environmental history list, possibly in its Nature | History | Society series. Two minor reservations were raised. First, the case studies seem disparate and may make unification into one book problematic. Second, the author’s analyses seemed to place undue emphasis on United Empire Loyalist traditions in certain areas, disregarding, for example, the First Nations and Acadian historical influences. Both concerns were to be noted to the author to ensure that the scholarship in this area is complete. The proposal was accepted.

AN EDITED VOLUME about university education in Canada was proposed. Somewhat unusual for a proposal, the entire draft manuscript was submitted. Also unusual was the breadth of contributions: nearly thirty essays, written by scholars in fields ranging from chemistry to cultural theory, all discussing how the university vision has changed over time. Although UBC Press has published numerous studies on higher education that have been well-received – including *Reshaping the University* and *Multicultural Education Policies in Canada and the United States*, which have proven successful in course adoptions – this collection does not have an overarching argument or direction, as shown in its brief introduction. Furthermore, there are too many contributors in the volume (fourteen is an unofficial maximum), which could make for time-consuming logistical difficulties in getting all the pieces assembled. The fact, too, that the manuscript was already completed, albeit in rough form, made the editors especially reluctant to accept it. The book seems more appropriate to a trade publisher than a scholarly one, and the proposal was rejected.

A PROPOSED EDITED VOLUME of papers about military oral history was put forth. The book would take the best papers presented at a recent conference on oral histories in the military, covering a wide range of topics on various historical conflicts. As noted by the acquisitions editor, it is a natural fit for UBC Press’s expertise in military history, and oral memory and history is currently a big issue in that field. In addition, the editor suggested she correspond with the general editor of the Studies in Canadian Military History series, which would unify the proposed volume with other books in UBC Press’s backlist, and provide \$5,000 in funding for production of the volume – not to mention raising potential sales at the Canadian War Museum and other venues. However, there was some reservation about the fact that this collection came out of a conference, since UBC Press generally does not publish conference proceedings, even though the volume would not be presented as such. Furthermore, the tentative table of contents indicated that the articles were to be organized in too many different ways – chronologically and thematically, for example. In the end, the importance of oral military history as a sub-field with little scholarly literature, it was agreed,

outweighed the conference proceedings concerns. It was decided that the acquisitions editor should pursue this book.

A PROPOSAL for a collection of essays about critical issues and ethics in science journalism was brought forth. The acquiring editor noted that science journalism is currently an unknown quantity but can often be highly distorted, with most lay readers lacking the knowledge to think critically about this. The proposed book, one editor noted, had “curious framing,” with little balance and no overall argument or thrust to the collection. In addition, it is not a “true” collection, most of the essays being written by the volume editor and one other author, and several other contributors seemingly used as padding. Another editor noted that the book’s intent to link science journalism to democracy was intriguing, but found the brief proposal unhelpful in elaborating this point. The acquiring editor agreed, but believed the collection had potential for being intriguing in its critique of a little-examined area, and compared it to another UBC Press book, *Morals and the Media*, which has sold over 2,000 copies and had some crossover trade appeal. The proposal was accepted, with a caveat that the shape of the essays and framing introduction and conclusion be re-examined once the manuscript was submitted.

A MANUSCRIPT PROPOSAL was submitted about Russians and Ukrainians in the Canadian Expeditionary Force during the First World War. The proposal was scanty, but was presented anyway for timing and approval reasons. The book would be a chronological study of the barriers to enlistment as well as interesting vignettes on how they contributed to the overall war effort. The book was compared by the acquiring editor to *Renegades*, a successful recent history of Canadians in the Spanish Civil War that has sold more than 2,000 copies. While the intended audience of persons interested in the socio-cultural impact of military service and general genealogical research does not fall into the overall UBC Press mandate, the book was deemed intriguing enough to pursue. However, the publisher requested that the author submit an introduction or first chapter before an agreement would be struck – something of an exceptional case – because the proposal was not wellwritten. Another factor in the book’s favour was its good fit with the press’s military history list. An inquiry was to be made to the general editor of the Studies in Canadian Military History series. If accepted for that series, the book would receive \$5,000 in funding from the Canadian War Museum, providing further incentive for publishing. In the meantime, the proposal was tentatively accepted, and would be reviewed upon seeing an introduction or writing sample.

A SUBMITTED PROPOSAL purporting to be the first comprehensive study of the Canadian homefront during World War II was discussed. The proposal was specific and well written, and the book itself would be an ideal fit for UBC Press’s list, linking with *Fighting From Home* by Serge Durflinger and *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers* by Jeffrey Keshen, both acclaimed and successful books. Additionally, the proposed manuscript crossed over into other areas, including social history and the growing field of material history and culture, and came to interesting and surprising conclusions about life at home during wartime. The final push was that the book would be an ideal addition to the Studies in Canadian Military History series, which would provide extra funding for publication. The proposal was approved.

A PROPOSAL FOR AN EDITED VOLUME examining links among health, community development, and the environment was submitted. The collection of essays by an interdisciplinary team of international scholars would look at the tension between science-based and community-based solutions, an under-researched area. There were concerns about the cohesiveness of the disparate topics explored in these essays, and reservations about the expertise of the authors; for example, there was only one political scientist contributing to a policy-heavy collection. These concerns weren't severe enough to warrant requesting sample essays or an introduction, however, and the proposal was accepted.

A SUBMITTED PROPOSAL described an edited collection about how community makeup, geography, gender, and economic status can affect health in Canada. The proposal posits a new methodology for understanding how these factors affect health care, which could appeal to practitioners and policy makers as well as academics. The essays are written by a mix of senior scholars, graduate students, and community health practitioners and workers. The editor is a respected scholar holding a research chair, and has worked with UBC Press on a previous edited volume, with an acclaimed book that had decent sales. At present, with a proposed eighteen chapters at approximately 8,000 words each, the collection would be quite long; editors suggested that perhaps two of the selections could be cut, and the remainder pared down to 6,000 words each. However, as the publisher noted, the collection has a strong medical health orientation, and could qualify for health-oriented funding, which is more abundant and lucrative than social sciences or humanities grants, as well as an ASPP grant. Although the length of each essay would still be monitored, potential for more funding would alleviate some of the pressure to pare the book down to size. The proposal was accepted.

AN EDITED COLLECTION exploring the cosmopolitanism of Canada, and its status as a prosperous but small middle power was proposed. Most prominently noted was one of the two co-editors, an internationally known author and scholar on multiculturalism who has published numerous books with the largest university presses and been translated into several languages. The editors have also attracted numerous "celebrity" authors (those who have published with trade) to the volume. The book was also determined to be a good fit for UBC Press's list, complementing such titles as *Multicultural Nationalism, Diversity and Equality*, and *Multiculturalism and the Canadian Constitution*. The major concern voiced was that the proposal seemed to emphasize that many of the essays are adapted from other sources, raising concerns that the essays would not be original, or worse, be abridged version of previously published works, posing a logistical nightmare for permissions. The proposal was approved, with a note to the editor to make sure that the proposed essays are original.

