



“Making a Difference. Making You Think”: Open Access at the University of Calgary Press

Our move to Open Access publishing at the University of Calgary Press began with a new vision and with our *Africa: Missing Voices* series. But the move has been made possible through the collaboration and support of our library colleagues.

The University of Calgary Press is a mid-sized scholarly press that publishes 20 books a year and provides its imprint to nine scholarly journals. Three years ago, we did an operational review and emerged with a new vision: “Making a difference. Making you think.” We want to publish work that moves the conversation forward, emphasizing works that make a difference and spark new research. As simple as our vision sounds, its underlying concept has proven to be a remarkably robust and effective evaluation tool. It is startling to see how much of the material that comes across our desks doesn’t really make us think.

Ingredients in the transition

We see “publishing” as a verb. The book isn’t the end in itself; it should be a catalyst for ongoing debate, inspiration and new research. Partnerships help us kick-start that discussion through book launches, course adoptions, workshops and presentations. We know that our authors make people think, and by generating discussion on critical issues, we know that they are making a difference.

One decision that emerged out of our review was to focus our publishing scope more closely on eight scholarly areas in which we have had success and have formed strong partnerships: *Africa: Missing Voices*; Art in Profile; Beyond Boundaries (Military and Strategic Studies); Cinema Off Centre, Energy, Ecology and the Environment (including Canadian History and the Environment); Latin American and Caribbean Studies; Northern Lights; and the West.

We secured the support of top-ranking scholars across the country to lead each series and to assist us in acquiring manuscripts, undertaking peer review and engaging in promotion. Additionally, we are very glad to be working with

key organizational partners who provide us with both financial and intellectual support: the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, the Latin American Research Centre and the Arctic Institute. We were particularly pleased when we were approached by NiCHE, the Network in Canadian History & Environment, to collaborate on a five-year series on research that looks at Canadian history through an environmental lens. It might be worth reporting that they came to us because of our Open Access publishing approach.

Open Access publishing is not a business model, in that it doesn’t make economic sense to publish books and give them away online. But our mandate, our business as an academic press, is to disseminate scholarly research to the widest possible audience, not to make a profit. We are a vital link in the academic research chain. People come to universities and to libraries to be inspired, to do research, to create new knowledge and to disseminate that knowledge to the wider community. Technology is an exciting new tool to help with that dissemination, including making it freely available.

Take, for example, our series *Africa: Missing Voices*, active since 2003 with eight titles published and two more underway. This important series sheds new light on issues and topics that have been ignored or are missing from current global discourse. We publish peer-reviewed research from emerging African scholars, emphasizing research that could change public policy or impact local governance. We had been publishing these books in Calgary, in small press runs of 300 or 500 copies, yet it costs \$50 to ship each book to Africa. We knew we couldn’t make a difference within the existing structure, so we had to find a new model.

We contacted our authors in the series for permission to make their works available through a Creative Commons licence that allows the non-commercial, non-derivative use of work online. They were unanimous in their support, and

we are now converting the books to downloadable pdf formats. We have also developed a database of African universities, libraries, research centres, government agencies and scholarly groups eager to receive the material online.

A broken business model

We are applying this collaborative approach to all of our titles and have been pleased with the response. In October 2010, we published our first Open Access book, *Grey Matters: A Guide to Collaborative Research with Seniors*, by Nancy Marlett and Claudia Emes, during International Open Access Week. This has led to a new partnership with the Marigold Library System in southern Alberta to engage older adults in undertaking research using this book, and to measure the results.

Open Access publishing is changing the paradigm of scholarly publishing. Scholarly presses have traditionally been considered ancillary services, like parking lots. Parking lots make money, the thinking goes; presses sell books, so they should make money, too. The increasing cost of printing, storing, marketing and distributing small-run special-interest titles in an environment where bookstores are closing and library budgets are decreasing means that the business model no longer works, if it ever did.

In embracing Open Access (though we continue to do print runs, too), we recognize that we have to do more than post pdfs on our website and call ourselves Open Access publishers. For the paradigm to truly shift, we need to develop new tools to evaluate and measure our success. Through the Calgary Foundation and Alberta Innovates: Health Solutions, we have secured funding to research and develop new evaluation tools to measure the reach and impact of Open Access publishing. Among the questions we are investigating: In addition to counting downloads and using Google Analytics, are there formats we can embed in our digital documents themselves to make them more accessible? Are there ways in which we can track the impact of our books through course adoptions, workshops and even long-term public policy changes?

There are still costs involved in Open Access publishing, but we have been able to reduce some of the pre-production expenses through open-source Open Journal Software. We continue to do print runs and earn income through book


sales. We are also grateful for ongoing support through national and provincial funding agencies. The research for most of the manuscripts we receive has already been supported through national research grants or through university faculties.

Worth the headaches

The University of Calgary Press is uniquely positioned to be initiating Open Access discussions. We are part of the wider library community at the university, and the collaboration of our library colleagues has been instrumental in our strategic planning. Through them we have a better understanding of the 24/7 needs of our key audience, the scholarly community. Librarians serve on our editorial board and on our journals committee, and provide vital insight into purchasing patterns, the role of aggregators, the changing needs of researchers, as well as licensing and copyright issues.

The Press is also part of an innovative new Centre for Scholarly Communication, which provides a suite of publishing services including digitization, institutional repository, copyright, the Synergies journal network, and the new Open Access Authors' Fund.

The shift to include Open Access publishing in our operations has not been a smooth process. (At times, we have considered changing our vision to "Making a difference. Making you drink!") Explaining to our authors what Open Access and Creative Commons mean has taken time (although less time than we expected), negotiating permissions for the use of images in the digital versions has been complicated, and adapting manuscripts to online versions is painstaking.

But the excitement is building. Within days of *Grey Matters* going up on the website, it was being downloaded in Russia, the United States, China and Australia – countries we could never have reached that quickly with traditional publishing. *That's* making a difference. 

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