

UCL Press: a new model for open access university presses

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Abstract. UCL Press was relaunched at UCL in June 2015, as the UK's first fully open access university press. It publishes scholarly monographs, textbooks, edited collections, scholarly editions and journals. All publications are made freely available online in open access form and print books are also sold via retailers at an affordable price. UCL authors are funded to publish open access with the Press. This article describes its activities in more detail and offers the model as one that other institutions can follow.

Keywords. Open access, university presses, electronic publishing, OA funding models

1. Introduction

UCL Press was officially relaunched at UCL in June 2015. It is the UK's first fully open access university press, and it publishes scholarly monographs, short monographs, textbooks, edited collections, scholarly editions and journals. It makes all its publications available to download in PDF form, and it also sells reasonably priced print copies of the books. UCL Press is funded by the institution, which believes that scholarly research should be made available freely to all for the wider benefit of society. UCL authors are funded by UCL to publish with UCL Press, providing a genuine open access publishing alternative.

This paper will describe the motivations for setting up UCL Press, the setting up process, its publishing activities so far, and its plans for the future, with the aim of describing the benefits of such a model and of providing inspiration to other universities.

2. Background and motivation for setting up UCL Press. And why OA?

The UCL Press imprint had previously been in operation at UCL in the 1990s. It grew to become a successful imprint, publishing around 100 scholarly monographs per year. Its success attracted the attention of commercial publishers and the imprint was licensed to Taylor & Francis.

However, by the mid-2000s, it appeared that there was little publishing going on under the UCL Press imprint. This was felt to be a missed opportunity by UCL, which believed there was great potential for publishing by academics at the institution, given the research-intensive nature of the university. At the same time, the open access

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movement was gaining momentum and UCL had been responding with some strong policies and initiatives. UCL's open access mandate was enshrined in the UCL Publications Policy, which requires that, copyright permissions allowing, a copy of all research outputs should be deposited in the UCL institutional repository, UCL Discovery, which is freely accessible to anyone, anywhere in the world. In early 2013 UCL also set up open access funding services, to provide comprehensive support to UCL researchers wishing to publish Gold open access with their chosen publisher.

A new, open access UCL Press, re-born at the heart of the institution, was the obvious complement to the existing OA services – UCL researchers now have a wide range of options to make their publications available open access. All UCL's open access services are run by UCL Library Services.

But in addition to support for UCL researchers, there was a wider reason for wishing to establish an open access press. UCL wanted to make a clear statement about its position vis à vis open access, and to provide inspiration to other organisations. It wanted to challenge the current publishing paradigm where scholarly research is kept behind a paywall, and to demonstrate that HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) can provide an alternative open access publishing model that benefits both the institution and its researchers by making their research available to all. UCL Press is the first fully open access university press in the UK, but others have since followed, including Westminster University Press and White Rose University Press. Institutions in other parts of the world have also taken this step. One example is ANU Press (The Australian National University Press), which was founded in 2004. It operates on a similar basis, offering free digital copies of its books and selling print copies. It was set up with similar missions to those of UCL Press and other open access publishers: to offer open access publishing for high quality ANU scholarship that lacked a commercial market; to eliminate the barriers inherent in existing models of scholarly communication; and a recognition that operational overheads of conventional academic presses are not affordable.

3. Benefits to the institution of having a university press

A university press benefits its home institution and society at large in numerous ways. The Association of American University Presses website describes the values of university presses, including:

- University Presses make available to the broader public, policy makers and leaders the research generated by university faculty.
- University Presses add value to scholarly work through rigorous editorial development; professional copyediting and design; and worldwide dissemination.
- University Presses extend the reach and influence of their parent institutions worldwide, making evident their commitment to knowledge and ideas.
- University Presses generate favorable publicity for their parent institutions through news coverage and book reviews, awards won, and exhibits at scholarly conferences. (Armato, Cohn and Schott)

When the benefits listed above are also made freely available as open access books and journals, the impact has the potential to be even greater because there is no barrier to anyone in the world accessing the works, as long as they have an internet connection. The eleven books published by UCL Press between June 2015 and February 2016 have been downloaded by nearly 22,000 people in over 150 countries round the world at the time of writing in March 2016. With typical scholarly monograph print sales widely reported as being in the low hundreds, these figures clearly demonstrate the reach of open access in comparison.

4. Setting up process

The process of setting up UCL Press took place over a period of just under 18 months, and was led by the Publishing Manager (the present author), Dr Paul Ayris, CEO of UCL Press and Director of UCL Library Services, and Martin Moyle, Assistant Director, Support Services, UCL Library Services, with the support of Professor David Price, Vice-Provost (Research) and the UCL Press Board.

4.1. Call for proposals and eliciting submissions

The first call for proposals for UCL Press was sent out in February 2014 to all staff at the university. Importantly, UCL Press funds UCL authors to publish with the Press – there are no Book Processing Charges for UCL staff. (The Press charges a BPC to non-UCL authors starting at £5000.)

The call elicited an excellent response. Within a matter of weeks the Press received around thirty proposals, including one by eminent scholar Professor Lisa Jardine. This turned out to be the inaugural publication for UCL Press, *Temptation in the Archives: Essays in Golden Age Dutch Culture*. In the first two years since the first call for proposals, the Press has had over 150 book proposals and over 20 journal proposals. This demonstrates that there is significant demand for open access publishing from academics, when they are properly supported.

In order to elicit further submissions, advocacy was undertaken around the university. The Publishing Manager undertook visits to staff meetings, research groups, deans of faculty and heads of department. Most of the promotion of the Press during its setting-up phase has been targeted at UCL academics. The Book Publication Charge to non-UCL authors can present a barrier, and this is being addressed through a waiver scheme which supports two or three non-UCL authors per year. Non-UCL authors tell staff at the Press that they are keen to publish with UCL Press because of its non-commercial open access ethos.

4.2. Funding

UCL Press is funded by the institution to publish works produced by its own academics. As described in the section above about the motivations for setting up the Press, UCL believes that making research widely available is the best way to solve the world's problems, as well as benefiting the institution by showcasing the work of its researchers. As a proportion of its overall budget, the amount spent on publishing research outputs is relatively low.

4.3. Staffing

UCL Press has four members of staff at the time of writing, who have joined the Press at various stages during its first two years. They are the Publishing Manager (the author of this article), Managing Editor, Commissioning Editor and Marketing and Distribution Manager. There are plans to recruit a Journals Manager and Administration Assistant during 2016.

4.4. Peer review policy and submissions process

All authors who wish their books to be considered by the Press are required to submit a proposal form containing information about the book's content and its place in the market. This is reviewed at an editorial board, and is sent to two peer reviewers, along with sample chapters or the full manuscript. This submissions and peer review process is undertaken for all books, whether they are written by UCL authors or not.

5. Publishing activity

Since its official launch in June 2015, UCL Press has published eleven books and three

journals, all available as open access PDFs. The books are also available to buy in paperback and hardback at between £15 and £25 for paperbacks. The books published in year one (2015) include *Temptation in the Archives: Essays in Golden Age Dutch Culture* by Lisa Jardine, *The Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology: Characters and Collections* edited by Alice Stevenson, *Biostratigraphic and Geological Significance of Planktonic Foraminifera* by Marcelle K. BouDagher-Fadel, *Suburban Urbanities: Suburbs and the Life of the High Street* edited by Laura Vaughan, *How the World Changed Social Media* by Daniel Miller et al and *Social Media in an English Village* by Daniel Miller. The journals UCL Press has published are *Architecture_MPS*, *The London Journal of Canadian Studies* and *Jewish Historical Studies*.

UCL Press also hosts the Open Journal Systems (OJS) platform, which allows students to publish their own open access journals. So far, four journals have been published on the site and there are four more planning to join in 2016. This gives students an excellent experience of writing and editing scholarly articles, and of managing the publishing process of a journal.

UCL Press is also involved in a project to publish textbooks. This project, The Institution as E-textbook publisher, is being funded and run by JISC and involves three other HEIs. It is intended as a study to assess the feasibility of HEIs publishing their own student textbooks, and the benefits and challenges associated with such activity. UCL Press's projects are a *Textbook of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery* and *Key Concepts in Public Archaeology*, both of which will publish in 2016. The project findings will be published in 2018, once data has been gathered during and post-production.

UCL Press plans to publish a total of 20 books in 2016 and another three or four journals, and around 30 books and four more journals in 2017, and has received sufficient proposals already to meet these targets.

5.1. Publishing platforms

UCL Press's open access monographs are stored in UCL's institutional repository, UCL Discovery in PDF form. These are directly accessed from UCL Press's website. UCL Discovery captures daily statistics of downloads around the world. The Press's open access monographs are also hosted on OAPEN, the European platform for hosting and disseminating open access monographs, unglue.it, and Worldreader, a charitable organisation that provides free ebooks and ereaders to developing countries.

In addition, UCL Press has developed a browser-based platform with technical developer Armadillo Systems. For this platform, pilot projects were published using the content from two UCL Press publications, *Treasures from UCL*, a book describing and illustrating UCL Library Services Special Collections, and *The Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology: Characters and Collections*. The digital editions feature dual navigation (chronological and thematic), slideshows, deep zoom features, 3D, audio and video, to give a very rich and distinctive reading experience.

The platform is now being developed for publishing scholarly monographs. This will have entirely different features, more suited to scholarly research and dissemination including the ability to highlight, make notes, export, cite, share and save personalised copies of the books. The other books published by UCL Press will be made available on this platform in spring 2016.

UCL's open access academic journals are hosted on IngentaConnect, a journal publishing platform that hosts the journals of over 300 scholarly publishers. IngentaConnect is widely used and is subscribed to by numerous institutional libraries.

6. Distribution and marketing

UCL Press currently uses the open access platforms described above to distribute the free PDF and browser-based versions of its books and journals. In order to distribute its print books, UCL Press uses distribution services from NBN International, a specialist book distributor used by numerous publishers, and sales representation to retailers (online, chain, campus, independent and specialist) via Compass Sales Representation, a UK agency that provides representation for a number of publishers.

UCL Press has a Marketing and Distribution Manager who provides a full range of marketing activities for all its books, and who also liaises with other UCL departments such as UCL Media Relations, Communications and Alumni Relations. The Marketing Manager uses social media, a print catalogue, the UCL Press website, book launches, list-servs, direct mailings, review copies, presentations, articles, press releases, conference promotion, author interviews and blogs, to promote UCL Press's titles.

7. Measures of success

Usage statistics and download figures are the key measures of success for UCL Press. The first eleven titles it has published since June 2015 have achieved combined download figures of over 22,000 (as of 4 March 2016). The highest downloads for individual titles have been achieved by *The Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology* which has been downloaded over 4000 times since June and *Temptation in the Archives*

which has been downloaded over 3500 times, and recent publications on social media have achieved significant downloads in the first week of publication: *How the World Changed Social Media* was downloaded nearly 2400 times in its first week after publication on 29 February 2016. Other measures of success that UCL Press takes into consideration are publicity, in the form of media coverage, social media and book reviews, and engagement by authors with UCL Press, in terms of the quantity and quality of proposals received.

Conclusion

While open access monograph publishing presents a number of challenges, not least the financial model, the case of UCL Press demonstrates that it is possible for an institution to establish its own alternative and that the benefits to the institution can be substantial. While there is a cost involved, the ability of an institution to showcase its own research is a clear demonstration of its wider impact on society, and of its ethos in making that research widely available to the world. By repurposing a part of its budget for open access publishing, an HEI can achieve wider impact with its publications than if they were behind a paywall, or reaching mainly institutional libraries. Open access presents an opportunity for institutions to reassert their role in the scholarly communications workflow, and to reach a diverse, global audience, potentially far greater than that reached via traditional publishing means.

References

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