Listbuilding at University Presses

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Why do university presses publish what they do? How has the nature of their publishing changed over time? Which parts of their environment, within their own universities and within the wider world of publishing, influence the shaping of presses’ lists? What is the role of editors in the publishing process at the university presses?

These are the principal questions I shall address in this essay, drawing from my experience as an editor at Princeton University Press for twenty-two years (1967–1989) and as director of the Penn State Press since then. The comparison between these two types of presses—one a prestigious large press at a leading private institution and the other a less well known small press at a major state university—will figure importantly in what I have to say.

There are two general observations that I want to make at the outset, however, and they need to be kept in mind as constants framing the overall working environment of editors at university presses—and probably at publishing houses of all types. First, it readily becomes clear to any editor who has been acquiring manuscripts for a few years that there is always a relatively small pool of absolutely first-rate books waiting to be published compared with the very much larger pool of perfectly competent, useful, but not brilliant books. The significance of this fact reveals itself in the often fierce competition that exists for the few best books and also in the dilution of quality in a press’s list when it attempts a major expansion in its annual output of titles; one cannot expect to publish twice as many books in a given field without accepting proportionately more second-than first-rate books.¹ Second, the
role of serendipity in publishing should never be underestimated. Any experienced editor will be able to cite examples of successes that are primarily attributable to sheer luck—being in the right place at the right time, taking advantage of coincidences, finding one manuscript when looking for another, and so on. A good editor will also be able to make these successes look, in retrospect, as though they were planned. What Walter Powell (1985) says of the commercial scholarly publishers he studied in *Getting into Print* is equally true of university presses: "The dynamics of acquiring manuscripts include chance elements that appear to have been rationally calculated only after a manuscript has been secured; rationales are then constructed to explain events" (p. 97). Luck can play a particularly salient role early in a publisher's efforts to enter a new field where the publisher has no prominent backlist and well-established reputation to serve as a magnet for attracting unsolicited submissions.

The Role of an Editor

Editors at university presses today typically perform one or the other of two distinctively different functions: finding books to publish or copyediting manuscripts once they have been put under contract. Even as late as the early 1980s, it was not uncommon to have these two jobs carried out by the same individual in some houses. At Princeton University Press, for instance, almost all acquiring editors used to do some copyediting, and some though not all copy editors did some acquiring; a few editors even had their jobs formally structured so that they spent half of their time on each type of editing. One advantage of this arrangement was to make acquiring editors more sensitive than they would be otherwise to the problems—hence extra costs—that some manuscripts would entail for copyediting and production, and that awareness could then enter more directly into the decision whether to pursue publication of a book in the first place. Increasingly, though, as specialization has affected the organization of university presses, these different editorial duties have been strictly separated; now at many presses (including both Princeton and Penn State) the people doing these jobs are not even members of the same department, the copy editors working within the production rather than the editorial department. Acquiring editors do continue to do some hands-on editing of a large-scale, structural type that is often called
“developmental,” and I shall have more to say about this part of an acquiring editor’s work later.

It should be understood in what follows that I am talking about the role of acquiring editors in this more specialized sense and not about the role that copy editors play in university presses, important though that is. To the extent that copyediting considerations enter into the editorial decision-making process now, they do mainly by way of reports that full-time copy editors prepare on manuscripts after they have been approved for publication by a press’s editorial board but before they have been put under contract; these reports are part of the procedure of gathering information (including estimates of manufacturing costs) that can affect the way in which terms of the contract are written (regarding, for instance, subsidies or royalties or requirements for preparation of the manuscript prior to copyediting)—and even, in rare instances, whether a contract is offered at all. Some acquiring editors still begin their careers as copy editors (as I did) and carry that kind of skill with them into their decision making, but it would be unusual nowadays to require an applicant for a position in editorial acquisitions to pass a copyediting test as a condition for employment.

I have so far used the term “acquiring editor” to designate that special type of editorial work that will be the focus of our attention here. This is a popular label that has the advantage of being straightforwardly descriptive of what an editor holding this position does. Other labels commonly used are “soliciting,” “procuring,” and “sponsoring” editor. August Frugé (1984), former director of the University of California Press, provides a good argument for preferring the latter: “In our early innocence we proposed to call them soliciting or procuring editors; after being told that we were stealing the terminology of another profession, we named them sponsoring editors, and encouraged each one to think of his/her books as lists within the larger list” (p. 173).

“Sponsoring editor” has the advantage of directing attention to the important roles as overseer, cheerleader, and liaison that an editor performs. As Paul Parsons (1989b) points out in Getting Published, “On agreeing to sponsor a manuscript, the editor becomes an unabashed advocate of the work throughout its passage toward publication” (p. 79). Walter Powell (1985) quotes the editor-in-chief of Plum Press as saying: “The sponsoring editor has the broadest, most general responsibility for each book, from the time that it is signed to the time that it is declared out of print. To
a very unusual degree, our editors work with other departments. Almost everything done by other departments, from ad copy to the jacket design, *has* to be approved by the book’s sponsoring editor (p. 132).

The term I personally prefer, however, is “listbuilder” or “listbuilding editor,” which we used at Princeton University Press. The significance of this name is partly revealed by August Frugé in his quote above, where he speaks of an editor’s developing “a list within the larger list.” Though not so frequently employed as the other labels, this one captures best what I consider to be the highest accomplishment to which any acquiring editor can aspire, namely, the development of a group of books that relate to each other in an intellectually coherent way such that they form a whole—a list—greater than the sum of the individual parts, or titles. A good analogy would be the bibliophile who buys rare books to constitute a collection by virtue of the unifying conception that has gone into the identification of each book as relating to the others in some intellectually accountable manner.

The bibliophile’s collection or the editor’s list makes a statement about the importance of this group of books that signals its intellectual value, which translates more or less directly into prestige and financial value: for the successful bibliophile, the enhancement of personal wealth and reputation; for the successful editor, the strengthening of the press’s image and presence in the fields the list covers, the ability to market the press’s books in these fields more effectively, and the attractiveness of the press to new authors of the best (and often best-selling) books.

A good illustration of what it means to build a list from my own experience may be found in the development of Latin American studies at Princeton University Press over a twenty-year period. For many years before I became social science editor in 1969, Princeton had been publishing books sponsored by the Rand Corporation. It happened that Rand had a vigorous program of research about Latin America under way at that time, and the Press because of its strong prior association with Rand became a natural outlet for a number of its book-length studies. I acquired, more or less passively in this way, three books on Latin America that were published in the early 1970s: Alfred Stepan’s *The Military in Politics: Changing Patterns in Brazil* (1971), Richard Nelson et al.’s *Structural Change in a Developing Economy: Colombia’s Problems and Prospects* (1971), and Herbert Goldhammer’s *The Foreign Powers in Latin America* (1972). I had very little familiarity with Latin American studies before becoming involved with these books; I had never
taken any courses in the field in college, nor had I even read much about that area of the world except in newspapers and magazines. But this fortuitous appearance of a trio of books in a short span of time gave me reason to learn more, and it gradually dawned on me that this field was spawning a whole new generation of young scholars who were at the forefront of the developing theoretical literature in the social sciences.

The previous generation, I was aware, had made political development the paradigm for research on the Third World, very largely through their case studies of African (and, to a lesser extent, Asian) countries. Many of the books resulting from this research were published by Princeton, which had a formal arrangement with the Committee on Comparative Politics of the Social Science Research Council to issue the edited volumes produced under its auspices. For various reasons, including the adverse reaction of African governments to social science research and the changing priorities of U.S. foundations, the focus of theoretical interest had begun to shift to Latin America. Already Latin American social scientists, influenced by Marxist theoretical currents flowing from Europe, had produced a significant body of writing about the dependent relationship of Latin American countries to the core advanced industrial states, especially the United States, and the stage was therefore set for a fruitful mixing of North American empirical modes of research with the fairly abstract theorizing typical of the approach taken by South American social scientists.

"Dependency theory" became the new paradigm, explicitly set forth as a kind of dialectical critique of the earlier political development literature. Once I became attuned to the inner dynamic driving this new generation of scholarship, I began vigorously to pursue the brightest of the young researchers for their books, many of which were revisions of their dissertations. Among the most successful of these, in part because it was one of the earliest to appear, was Peter Evans's *Dependent Development: The Alliance of Multinational, State, and Local Capital in Brazil* (1979).

What is striking about this work, and about the work of this generation of scholars in general, is its strong interdisciplinary character; one would not know from reading it that this was the writing of a sociologist rather than a political scientist or an economist. Much of the intellectual excitement and appeal of this new literature in Latin American studies was due to its revival of political economy in its original form, prior to disciplinary specialization, in the era of Adam Smith or—more to the point here—Karl
Marx. This interdisciplinary flavor also characterized the work of anthropologists and historians doing research on Latin America, and as I developed the program at Princeton, we began adding books in those areas, too. A notable example of a book by a historian strongly influenced by anthropology was Nancy Farriss's *Maya Society under Colonial Rule* (1984), which went on to win three major academic book awards. The active dialogue and cross-fertilization of ideas among scholars in all of these presumptively separate disciplines within the overarching field of Latin American studies made its conventions, publications, and networks fertile ground for an editor to till, and because of its unifying themes and approaches a list of books built upon it could have a very real identity and impact.

I took particular pride in developing this list for Princeton because that press had hardly published any books on Latin America before and because it became a natural extension, on a theoretical level, of the strong backlist the press had earlier developed on studies of political development in African and Asian countries. One particularly satisfying testimony to the success of my efforts came from a historian whose book on nineteenth-century Peru, written in part as a critique of the dependency approach, had been accepted for publication before my departure from Princeton but was published afterward. He wrote to a former colleague: "I do hope that Princeton University Press will continue its strong tradition in Latin American studies; if you took a vote among Latin Americanists, I’m convinced that Princeton’s would come out now as the top list in the world." Whether he meant it that way or not, I was especially gratified by his use of the word “list” in this context, which confirms my view that listbuilding is the best term to describe what an editor does.

If listbuilder is the most satisfactory name to use overall, still there are aspects of an editor’s role that can be more precisely delimited by other names, and I shall briefly try to highlight these special dimensions of what editorial work involves by focusing on the editor as hunter, selector, shaper, linker, stimulator, shepherd, promoter, ally, and reticulator.

**Hunter**

Hunting for new manuscripts is a principal activity of any editor, and this term nicely captures the elements of aggressiveness, risk, suspense, competitiveness, and survival that are involved in listbuilding. The days when editors could afford to stay at their
desks and just handle manuscripts arriving over the transom or respond to letters of inquiry are long gone. The competition among university presses, and between them and some commercial publishers, that intensified in the 1970s has made it necessary for press editors to engage in aggressive acquiring behavior, including frequent travel to conventions and college campuses, to track down and capture the always scarce quarry of first-rate authors in order to ensure the survival and prosperity of their houses.

An interesting, though perhaps not typical, example from my own recent experience is a book about the currently much discussed topic of date rape. A panel on this subject was held at the Pacific Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association in 1991. The principal speaker was the author of a paper that had been chosen as winner of the Fred Berger Memorial Prize by the APA Committee on Philosophy and Law; the commentators included two law professors and a philosophy professor. I attended the session as much out of personal curiosity as anything else, but while listening to the speakers became persuaded that their talks could form the basis for a very good book on the subject. I spoke with some of the panelists afterward, suggested the idea then, and followed up in correspondence with them later. The volume, as of this writing, is still in the process of being completed, but I am confident that it will be both a timely and pedagogically valuable work for use by teachers in college courses. This is a topic all college students care about, and a good book probing the philosophical and legal dimensions of the issue could help them appreciate the value of learning how to think about it critically.

Selector

Once editors have succeeded in ferreting out and securing submission of manuscripts, their next job is to select the ones that will contribute the most to enhance their press’s list by way of prestige, profit, or preferably both. This is what many call the gatekeeping function that university presses carry out in identifying what most deserves to be widely disseminated and in legitimating its status as a genuine advance in scholarly knowledge. So central is this function, in fact, that it is sometimes argued that “gatekeeping is the one indispensable function they perform” (Goellner, 1990b, p. 8).

The decision making that editors undertake at this stage may appear to outsiders as though it reflects complete editorial autonomy, but in fact there is a variety of constraints affecting the decisions
that editors reach. Some take the form of explicit rules. At some presses manuscripts exceeding a certain length must be rejected, regardless of their merits; or at least these manuscripts cannot be sent out for formal review by experts without authorization from the editor-in-chief or director. The need for a subsidy to publish a particular book may affect how it gets reviewed and will certainly determine how the contract gets written. Editors at some houses have to operate within a formal system of quotas, whereby they are required to sign up a minimum number of titles with sales potential of over, say, three thousand copies and are not allowed to sign up any more than a certain number of titles with sales potential less than, say, one thousand copies. For some presses the faculty at their own universities have privileges not accorded to authors from other universities; for example, editors cannot reject a faculty member’s manuscript without soliciting one or more external reviews and without having the decision formally approved by the press’s editorial board. Prior obligations, such as a press’s standing agreement with a series editor or a sponsoring organization, may further limit the flexibility an editor has in conducting the review of a manuscript.

Other constraints take a more subtle form—what Walter Powell calls “unobtrusive controls” (1985, pp. 144–58). These have to do with the traditions, or “personality,” of a publishing house—the accumulated weight of past editorial decisions that have already given a distinctive character to the press’s list and make some types of books more appropriate for it than others. Just as the press’s image in a certain field serves as a signal to communicate with prospective authors looking for the right publisher, so too does it lead editors to look most favorably on those manuscripts that best complement what the press has already published; and it becomes a heavy burden for a new press director who may want to steer the house in a different direction!

Besides these more or less overt constraints, which operate constantly to frame and guide editorial decisions, there are other elements of gatekeeping that can pose special challenges from time to time. Some situations pose “political problems” (cf. Powell 1985, p. 113). An editor may want to reject a manuscript recommended by a member of the editorial board, or one written by an author whose previous books the press has published, or one solicited from an influential senior scholar that turns out to be disappointing. In such circumstances an editor—especially one without a long track record from working in the field that has provided that editor with some independent credibility—may choose to manipu-
late the review process in such a way as to lead to the desired outcome without appearing to be the direct cause of it, either by selecting readers not expected to be particularly sympathetic to the author's work or by passing the buck to the editorial board, which can make the final decision on the basis of the editor's recommendation and thus appear to the author to be the arbiter of his or her fate (cf. Powell, 1985, p. 107).

Manipulation can also work in favor of an author. When an editor is predisposed to want a book published, choosing the right readers can make all the difference in the outcome, especially when the book has a strong ideological slant. This cannot be done too blatantly, however, for any good editorial board will rightly raise questions about the choice of readers and, if bias appears to play too obviously a predetermining role, will ask for additional review by a less partisan reader; in fact, excessive enthusiasm from readers can serve, in the eyes of editorial board members, to undermine the credibility of their reports.8

Another problem that can arise is relying too much on the same readers. Editors understandably like to use readers who have proven themselves prompt and responsible on past occasions. But they run a risk—the same associated with a series edited by a single scholar—of becoming too much the captive of those readers' own enthusiasms and biases. This problem becomes exacerbated when one relies on the same reader to review, time and again, the work of a prolific author. There is much to be said for an editor's nurturing an author's loyalty to a press, and few satisfactions for an editor can match the pleasure that comes from a close working relationship with an author developed over the course of publishing two, three, four, or more books; but if the editor always has that author's work evaluated by the same one or two reviewers, who are consistently enthusiastic about it, there may be a danger of favoritism that can backfire. Here, or course, it is more important than ever for an editor who succumbs to this temptation to use the reviews subsequently published in professional journals as a check to see whether the prepublication reader's opinion reflects a consensus or an idiosyncratic viewpoint.

Finally, there is the inevitable disgruntled author that an editor must handle, as tactfully as possible. In my experience, fewer authors express displeasure with the review process, or even the production of their books, than with the marketing (or, as they would say, the lack of it) that follows publication. But there are enough who run afoul of procrastinating readers, or mixed reviews, or other circumstances that can hinder steady progress toward a
prompt decision to require an editor always to be prepared to respond to complaints.

At Princeton in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the press faced a problem with disgruntled authors that grew to such proportions that it caused real damage to the press’s reputation—exacerbated, I suspect, by the readiness of editors at other presses to take advantage of Princeton’s situation. The press’s director, not wanting to let the list grow too rapidly and sacrifice quality to quantity, set a target for the number of new books to be accepted each year. That target was then used to determine how many manuscripts, on average, the editorial board could be allowed to approve at each of its meetings. During this period, however, the press came to have such a productive group of editors that very often the agenda for the board’s meetings would contain as many as 25 percent more manuscripts than the quota would permit the board to accept. Consequently, the press over time developed the reputation of stringing authors along, encouraging them with favorable reviews solicited by the editors, and then rejecting their books at the very last stage—because the editorial board could not approve all the manuscripts recommended by the staff. The authors who got burned in this way naturally vented their frustration not only at the press but to their friends and colleagues in the profession; and the press’s editors eventually found themselves having to work at damage control in persuading authors to submit manuscripts in the first place and not to withdraw them at later stages of the review process.

The tension in the system was finally relieved, when I became editor-in-chief, by a change from having an overall quota for the press to having each editor work within the constraints of a personal quota, thus encouraging editors to monitor their own lists more closely in a quantitative as well as qualitative way and put fewer manuscripts into the pipeline for review at the outset. This adjustment to the system helped achieve greater balance, in a more planned manner, among the areas in which the press published, as an additional benefit. It also helped improve staff morale, which had been affected negatively by the internal competition among editors that the earlier way of operating had promoted and also, of course, by the rising chorus of complaints from rejected authors. Although this was a special case of an editorial system gone awry, owing to the unusual productivity of Princeton’s acquisitions staff at this time, it highlights the importance generally of not being cavalier about rejecting manuscripts—at any stage in the process of review, early or late. As Walter Powell (1985) affirms, “an inap-
propriate or thoughtless rejection letter can... have dire consequences. ... Academics have well-organized grapevines; word gets around the academic community very quickly” (p. 112). The editors at Princeton, by force of circumstance, became especially adept at writing rejection letters during this period!

Shaper

The editor’s work is not done when the manuscript has finally cleared the hurdle of approval by the editorial board and a contract has been signed. Even sometimes before acceptance, and even on occasion before a manuscript is sent out for its first review by an expert, an editor has an opportunity—limited, naturally, by the scarcity of time available to any productive editor—to help shape a manuscript by engaging in what has usually been called “developmental” or “structural” editing, as distinct from line-by-line copyediting. This is editing that assists an author in dealing with such problems as the sequence of chapters, the proper role and content of a preface, introduction, and conclusion, the relationship of evidence to argument, the use or misuse of footnotes, omissions of important relevant literature from the bibliography, and general stylistic shortcomings such as the overuse of the passive voice, sexist language, too heavy reliance on quotations from other authorities, and broad-scale inconsistencies of a type that require more than simple copyediting to resolve. Developmental editing can cover a wide spectrum of advice, from basic instruction on how to go about successfully transforming a dissertation into a book, to the gentle offer of suggestions about fine-tuning an argument or element of style.¹⁰

To give a better idea of the type of interaction with the author this kind of editing involves, I quote from a letter by a Princeton author, David Norton, written to a third party about the work I had done on his book Personal Destinies (1977):¹¹

My acquaintance with Mr. Thatcher consists in our close working relationship of four years, toward the publication of my book. ... Sent to my files by the talk of writing this letter I found there no less than 100 pages of detailed commentary to Mr. Thatcher upon each chapter and each page, as well as upon the organization and development of the book as a whole. I recall very vividly my awareness, in the early stages, that by his resolve nothing was going to appear in print that was less than the best humanly possible. This resolve proved contagious, and
I girded myself to emulate it. Subsequently and to this end the book—600 typewritten pages—was rewritten once from begin-
ning to end, and twice more partially, all under the continuous chapter-by-chapter scrutiny of Mr. Thatcher. Not an argument or developmental opportunity was left unexamined by him. . . . What his initial response forcibly indicated was his remarkable ability to lend himself to it, to see it from the “inside,” and discern unerringly where it was going. From that point on, his every move was given to the purpose of fulfilling its intrinsic aim. . . . He discerned the inner criteriology of the work—often to a degree surpassing my own perception of it—and held the book to the fulfillment of its own promise. Had he not done this the book would not be published, for its internal criteriology is a departure from today’s fashion. And in holding the book to its own promise, he was tough and relentless.

Needless to say, this kind of deep engagement with a book is the exception rather than the rule, and no editor could afford the luxury of spending this much time on more than a very few books. For me, it happened to be a book I found particularly stimulating, and my own background in philosophy gave me greater resources on which to draw in advising the author and getting “inside” his argument than I would otherwise have had. But, at one extreme, this example does show what, in an ideal world with unlimited time, an editor could contribute to many books.

Linker

Editors rarely specialize in a subject to the extent that scholars, by necessity, must; indeed, dilettante is a word that is sometimes used to characterize an editor by contrast with the scholar as an expert. What editors lack in depth, however, they compensate for by having a wider vision of the terrain of scholarship, which can provide advantages in espying links among different areas of ongoing scholarly activity.

One example of the kind of linkage that an editor can accomplish is provided in the same letter by David Norton quoted ear-
lier:

I consider myself to be rather widely read, but I soon found that his scope far surpassed my own, particularly with respect to new and recent work, and work in progress both in our country and abroad. My education began with his recommendations of current work on themes treated in PersonalDestinies, and of which
PD should take account. But gradually I became aware that he was lending his resourcefulness not only to the book but to its author. He has repeatedly provoked me to think about themes which are outgrowths of the book, but which on my own I had failed to recognize or had managed successfully to neglect. Likewise thanks to his initiatives I am in touch with a continuously expanding circle of theorists whose current work bears upon my own, but of whom I was unaware. Without question my recent development owes much to Mr. Thatcher.

The links here were mostly within the field of philosophy and involved both associations among ideas and associations among people. Editors, with their antennae always extended to pick up early signals of new ideas and their extensive networks of individual contacts, play a meiotic role in making connections among different strands of intellectual development and among the different scholars pursuing them.

Another example of editorial midwifery, also within one field, resulted not only in two scholars establishing contact with one another about their work but also in their collaborating as coauthors of a book. In the mid-1980s, while discussing his ideas for a book about the modern intelligence community with Bruce Berkowitz, then a political scientist at the University of Minnesota, I received an inquiry from Allan Goodman, associate dean of the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, who proposed a book of a similar kind. In fact, both individuals had in mind writing a book that would perform the service for today's world that Sherman Kent's classic study *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* (Princeton, 1949) had provided for the immediate postwar world. Once made aware of each other's plans through my good offices, Berkowitz and Goodman immediately saw the advantages from collaborating and ended up writing *Strategic Intelligence for American National Security* (1989). Indeed, their collaboration continued, again with my encouragement, as they joined forces in helping the Penn State Press to launch its series of publications emanating from the CIA's Historical Review Program, the first two volumes of which, with their introduction and commentary, appeared in 1990 and 1992.12

But an editor's ability to force links is not limited to activity within a single discipline. Because many editors have responsibility for acquisitions in a number of fields, they have a vantage point not available to most scholars of being able to juxtapose and relate developments going on within different disciplines.13 Work-
ing in philosophy and political science, I recall vividly how striking it was in the mid-1970s to observe political scientists engaged in fierce debates about scientific methodology that were considered old hat by philosophers at that time. There was a cultural lag of about ten years between these two fields, and in talking with political scientists, I had the advantage of knowing the philosophical literature well enough to point out what answers had already been given to many of the questions political scientists were then discussing. I also could see real differences in the ways that political philosophy was done in these two disciplines—one much more historical and contextual in its approach, probing authorial intention and patterns of influence, the other much more concerned with analysis of arguments for their own sake, independent of historical origin, and with rational reconstructions of classic positions like utilitarianism or social contract theory.¹⁴

But editors themselves wear disciplinary blinders, less restricting though they may be than the ones that make many scholars so myopic. As sponsoring editor for Richard Rorty’s now famous Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (1979), I was oblivious to the tremendous appeal this book would have to scholars in literary criticism because, while vaguely aware of names like Derrida, I did not work in that field as an editor and was not intimately in touch with the currents of Continental theory that were beginning to sweep over departments of English and comparative literature. To his credit, Lindsay Waters, then an editor at the University of Minnesota Press who had taught literature and was handling that field as well as philosophy at the press, did appreciate the significance of Rorty’s work for literary theory, and when I declined to encourage submission of Rorty’s collection of essays, Walters leaped upon it eagerly and The Consequences of Pragmatism (Minnesota, 1982) was the result.¹⁵ This was part of Waters’s strategy to make Minnesota the preeminent American publisher of Continental literary and philosophical theory, which he accomplished with great success before moving on to become a general editor at Harvard University Press.

This lesson was not lost on me, however, and I have made amends at the Penn State Press by working closely with my fellow editor Philip Winsor, who knows literary criticism from years of experience in the field, in establishing a new series in literature and philosophy edited by Anthony Cascardi of Berkeley’s Department of Comparative Literature. One of the early products of that series will be a volume of original essays introducing the work of the well-known analytic philosopher Donald Davidson to literary theo-
rists and, in turn, showing philosophers how Davidson’s work has relevance to literary theory. There is a real irony here in that, as Reed Way Dasenbrock explains in his introduction to this volume,

there is a sense in which literary theorists have absorbed analytic philosophy primarily through being interested in the reaction against it. The work of Richard Rorty has been an important agent in this contradictory process: *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* tells us . . . that analytic philosophy has self-deconstructed, yet *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* was also the first detailed introduction to contemporary analytic philosophy for many literary theorists.

Having been partly responsible for leading literary theorists down the garden path, I feel some special obligation to set them straight again!

Because of their broad view of the scholarly horizon, editors have a special fondness for interdisciplinary work, and it is no accident that university presses publish a great deal of it, perhaps out of proportion to the importance it has within individual disciplines (as judged, for instance, by tenure committees). This meiotic role is usually not very visible to the outsider but, I suggest, it is valuable in stimulating scholars to pursue lines of inquiry that the structures of reward in their own specialized fields might not otherwise justify. As Paul Parsons (1989a) observes,

University presses, as a leading vehicle for intellectual discourse, seldom serve as passive gatekeepers. Instead, they actively shape the cultural agenda by defining their role in the scholarly enterprise through listbuilding and aggressive acquisition methods. By being on the frontiers of scholarship, a press can help direct the cultural agenda, rather than merely reinforce existing values, beliefs, and practices. (p. 175)

**Stimulator**

Just as editors can help shape the cultural agenda by forging links among people and ideas, so too can they influence the direction of scholarship by stimulating the production of certain kinds of writing. Editors at university presses, unlike their counterparts at some commercial houses (especially those involved with textbook and reference book publishing), rarely commission books, it is true; their primary job is to keep abreast of the latest advances
in scholarly knowledge and encourage the writing of books em-
bodying these new ideas. But sometimes editors have opportuni-
ties to provide incentives for scholars to consider writing a certain
kind of book they might not otherwise have thought about.

Several examples of this kind of initiative come to mind. Even
before he left Princeton University Press (where I succeeded him
as social science editor in 1969), William McClung had begun to
work on promoting the concept of the short book as a vehicle for
the expression of ideas that would offer an outlet for writing at a
length beyond what most journals would accept for publication
as an article yet shorter than what most publishers normally con-
sider to constitute a book—say, between 60 and 120 printed pages.
He laid out his thinking in an article for the very first issue of
Scholarly Publishing, which he began with a telling quote from Harold
J. Laski: "One sixteen-page tract by a George Bernard Shaw will
do more good than all of the Ph.D. theses of Harvard, Yale, and
Princeton combined" (1969, pp. 45-52). After joining the editorial
staff at the University of California Press, he implemented this
idea by founding a new series of short books called "Quantum
Books" and set about signing up authors to write them. The first,
by Chalmers Johnson entitled Autopsy on People's War, appeared
in 1974. To date, a total of forty-one have been published, includ-
ing such notable titles as Robert Dahl's A Preface to Economic De-
mocracy (1985) and Michael Foucault's This Is Not a Pipe (1982),
which has so far held the record for total sales of three thousand
in hardback and twenty thousand in paperback.

The short book, I can testify from my own experience, has a
special appeal. As McClung points out, it "can be read as a unit,
at a single sitting, as a singular and coherent intellectual
experience" (p. 46). Among my favorite books at Princeton were
two of this kind, The Passions and the Interests (1977) and Shifting
Involvements (1982), both by Albert O. Hirschman, who is an ac-
knowledged master of this genre, an essayist in the tradition of
Montaigne.

Placing more emphasis on speed of publication and timeliness
of the topic than on the brevity of presentation was Yale's "Fast-
back" series, launched in 1969 with the publication of an edited
volume, Black Studies in the University. Perhaps the most famous
book to appear in this series so far was Impeachment (1974) writ-
ten by noted constitutional scholar Charles Black. To educate the
public about the process of impeachment, at a time when it looked
as though President Richard Nixon might be subjected to it, Black
completed the manuscript in three weeks, and the Yale Press rushed
it through production in twenty-eight days—an all-time record for the series. The book sold some sixteen thousand copies very quickly, and then, once Nixon resigned, stopped selling almost instantly. Another Yale Fastback that has once again taken on new interest and relevance is Catherine MacKinnon's *Sexual Harassment* (1979). The fortieth title in this now well-established and successful line was published late in the fall of 1991: *What Is to Be Done? Proposals for the Soviet Transition to the Market*. Although some of the books in the series might well have been written and published anyway, its existence certainly provided a stimulus—no more clearly so than in the case of Black's overnight sensation.

A final example comes from the late 1960s when the confluence of several events provided the stimulus for the founding of the journal *Philosophy and Public Affairs* in 1971. Within philosophy there had gradually come into being during the late 1960s a renewed interest in political philosophy, which had prematurely been declared dead in the 1950s. Most influential in this movement probably was the work of John Rawls, whose *Theory of Justice* when finally published by Harvard University Press in 1971 immediately set in motion a whole new industry. At the same time, the growing opposition to the Vietnam War, which heightened political consciousness on college campuses everywhere, threw into question the emphasis on "value-free" social science that had been the hallmark of the so-called behavioral revolution in the early 1960s.

Drawing on these two currents, a group calling itself the Society of Philosophy and Public Policy was formed in May 1969. Its initial efforts focused on drafting resolutions—on the My Lai massacre, the invasion of Cambodia, the shootings at Kent State—and gathering signatures on them to submit to the government. But it quickly became clear that if the society were to wield any real influence, it would not by passing resolutions and engaging in direct political action, but rather by doing what philosophers do best—promoting critical thinking.

Eventually, with Marshall Cohen and Thomas Nagel leading the way, some of the founding members of the society suggested starting a new journal to provide a vehicle for creative philosophical debate about important public issues. As a member of the society since October 1969, I was privy to these discussions and invited Marshall Cohen to submit a proposal to Princeton University Press. The first issue came out in the fall of 1971, and it quickly established itself as the premier journal in the field. Later, again at my invitation, Cohen became editor of a series of books for Princeton
called "Studies in Moral, Political, and Legal Philosophy." Together the journal and the series have provided an outlet for a major renaissance in the field of political philosophy.

Shepherd

Within any publishing house the editor represents the author to all other departments, oversees the passage of the manuscript through the various stages of production in a general way, and seeks to coordinate all the work that staff copyediting, design, and marketing do to ensure that the book receives the best treatment that is appropriate for it. In this sense, the editor serves to shepherd the book on its way toward publication, watching over it carefully though not tending personally to every detail. The importance of this role cannot be emphasized enough because without one person to guide the process on the author's behalf, inevitable mistakes will be made by personnel in other departments that an alert and responsible editor could have forestalled—such as forgetting to send the book to a particular convention's exhibit, to submit it for an appropriate prize, or to make sure that the jacket design accords with the author's expectations, at least in a general way.

Promoter

The editor's work does not end with the appearance of a book in print. However well produced a book may be, and however much the editor has done to ensure its scholarly quality, no book can succeed in accomplishing its purpose unless it reaches the audiences for which it is intended. Although the marketing department has the chief responsibility for promotion, a good editor will function also as the author's cheerleader, first within the house by stimulating enthusiasm for the book among other staff and then later by actively helping carry out the marketing department's plans. Contacts that an editor has developed with book review editors at major media, for instance, can be called into play for titles that have genuine trade potential. Or an editor, knowledgeable about different organizations with special interests, might be aware of a prize that one of these organizations sponsors for which the book could be submitted.

An example of such promotion is a publication party I helped arrange for two authors of new Penn State Press books who happen to be colleagues and friends at Lafayette College in Easton,
Pennsylvania. Taking advantage of my prior acquaintance with the new president of Lafayette, Robert Rotberg, we arranged the party at the Easton Bookshop for a time when he could attend. Such a celebration can serve a variety of purposes: pleasing two young authors who are just beginning what look to be very promising scholarly careers; highlighting the visibility of the Penn State Press as a potential publisher for other Lafayette authors; and establishing good relations with a local bookstore.

Ally

The loyalty of an author to a publishing house is a value that no editor should underestimate. There was a time when commercial publishers such as Scribner’s would rate their long-term relationships with authors, such as Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Wolfe, developed by the legendary editor Maxwell Perkins, as one of their greatest achievements. The conglomeratization of commercial publishing has made this a fading tradition, unfortunately, although it still remains alive in some British houses. For university presses, which do not have the financial resources to offer sizable advances and other economic lures to authors, the possibility of fostering loyalty by other means continues to be a realizable goal to which editors can aspire. The advantages to a press come not only from the author’s own productive output, which may number a half-dozen or more books over the course of a career, but from that author’s good will in referring other authors to the press and, generally, serving as a cheerleader for the press, too. What was said earlier about the rapid spread of negative information about a publisher through the academic grapevine is equally true for positive information; loyal authors are primary allies of any publisher in creating a good public image.

As an ally of the author, an editor makes the author’s project, which may take many years and several books to accomplish, in some ways his or her own. This does not necessarily mean that the editor shares the author’s intellectual agenda or ideological point of view; it only means that the editor believes that the author has something important to say, worth disseminating to as wide a public as the publisher can reach. Most editors probably have the fundamental faith that I do in John Stuart Mill’s concept of the “marketplace of ideas,” and it is to help enrich that marketplace as much as possible that we dedicate our efforts as editors.

As much as I have an identifiable personal ideology, I would describe myself as a Millian liberal; yet several of the authors with
whom I have developed long-term relationships are identified in the public eye as “conservative” thinkers—Hadley Arkes, Julian Simon, and Thomas Sowell. Testimony from the author’s side of what this kind of relationship involves I can offer here from two of these people, both from letters written to me in 1990 after I had already moved to Penn State. Arkes wrote gratifyingly of the wonderful reactions he was receiving to First Things (1986), the third of four books I sponsored for him at Princeton, from many quarters both within and outside academe. He said:

as these reports have come in over the past year, I’ve kept thinking of you. It was your backing that became critical, decisive, for the publication of all of my books; and with these reactions to First Things, I’ve felt that we’ve finally had the kind of sustained reaction that can establish a justification for these projects. If the book managed to touch many thoughtful people in an enduring way, what better confirmation could we have for the decision to produce these books.

And Simon, author of three books for Princeton, two of which I handled, wrote:

If it had not been for S. Thatcher and PUP, my 1977 book probably would still be looking for a publisher. . . . And if the 1977 book had not come out, all the rest on population would not have happened, also. The dissemination of radically new ideas hangs on a much thinner thread than most people believe, even in a pluralistic society. DNA would have been discovered in a few months even without Watson and Crick, but in the social sciences, one editor and one press can be decisive for a long time.

Allies like these, it should be added, also often end up being good friends.

Reticulator

“To reticulate,” according to the Random House dictionary, is “to form a network.” A major activity of editors is building networks—networks of advisors, whether they are authors or not, who can keep an editor informed of new developments in a field, refer an editor to work in progress by colleagues, provide early leads to the best and brightest of the graduate students whose dissertations may be worth transforming into books, and even serve as
reviewers of completed manuscripts. Paul Parsons (1989b) says, simply, "networking is essential" (p. 59). Walter Powell (1985) affirms that "the primary means for editors to keep au courant of the professional disciplines in which they work is through building and maintaining a wide and active personal network" (p. 74). I agree with Parsons, but I think Powell goes too far; while essential and a primary source of information for editors, I would not describe networking as the "primary means" without qualification.

Editors are individuals who work in different ways, preferring some methods more than others, to achieve the same ends; not all would place networking at the top of the list, though I am confident that all would concur in its importance at some level as essential for their success. A network, in a sense, is an expanded alliance: allies are those authors with whom an editor has developed the closest working relationships over the longest period of time; members of a network include allies but also many other scholars with whom an editor maintains sufficient contact to keep the pipeline of information open. Senior editors are valuable not only because of the experience they have acquired but also because of the networks they are plugged into; a publisher hiring a senior editor gains the benefit of both the experience and the network the editor has developed.

All nine of these specific roles that I have discussed as parts of the listbuilder’s job show what editors contribute as "value added" to the book as product in the process of publication and, more broadly, to the system of scholarly communication. Those who currently speak about electronic publishing as the wave of the future, putting the author directly in touch with the reader, often are oblivious to these many and varied contributions that editors make.

**Characteristics of Presses**

Although editors at university presses continue to wield the greatest influence on what gets published, in contrast with the waning influence of their counterparts in commercial publishing, they nevertheless find their decision making channeled in a variety of ways, not only by operating rules within the house itself of the kind mentioned earlier but also by features of the press that are defined by the nature of the university to which it is attached, its own size and reputation, the strengths of its parent university, the character of its backlist and publishing tradition, the background and interests of its director, and the policies and procedures of its editorial board.
State vs. private

Almost all university presses function as departments of their universities, with the director reporting to the dean of the graduate school, a vice president for academic affairs, or the provost. The exact positioning of the press within the university’s overall bureaucratic structure can have some effect on how it operates and what it tries to achieve, but probably more important in influencing editorial decisions is the status of the press’s parent university as either private or public. Of the current regular members of the Association of American University Presses that are attached to universities located in the United States, forty-nine are at public universities and twenty-four at private institutions.

It is no accident that those presses situated within public universities have pioneered in the publishing of books of regional interest, whereas hardly any of the presses connected with private universities have engaged in it to any significant extent. At Princeton, for instance, regional publishing meant issuing an occasional book focusing on some aspect of the university’s or the town’s history; it was taken for granted that books about any other area of the state would go to Rutgers University Press as their natural publisher. Some regional publishing is done within the framework of series. Illinois has its Prairie State Books; Florida has Sand Dollar Books.

At Penn State, we identify some titles as Keystone Books to distinguish these publications, mainly aimed at entertaining and informing a broad range of citizens within the state, from works of primary scholarship that have a major academic contribution to make even though they happen to focus on one or another aspect of the state’s history, politics, environment, or culture. Two titles issued late in 1992 illustrate the difference. The Allegheny River: Watershed of the Nation is a heavily illustrated, coffee-table book that is sold to the general public through retail bookstores and advertised in popular magazines. Harrisburg Industrializes: The Coming of Factories to an American Community, by contrast, though also illustrated, is an ambitious work of revisionist scholarship that will have its main impact through reviews in professional journals and should influence the way academic studies of urban history are done in the future.

Presses in the South and the Southwest have been especially active and innovative in regional publishing. A fine example of the genre is the Encyclopedia of Southern Culture published in 1989 by the University of North Carolina Press, which pioneered in the
publication of regional books beginning in the 1930s. The University of New Mexico Press, publisher of many books about the Southwest Indian life and culture including best-seller *The Education of Little Tree*, claims to derive fully 60 percent of its income from sales of regional titles.26 The strength of regional ties even accounts in part for the advent in popularity of fiction publishing at university presses; it began to grow significantly in the wake of the major success of *The Confederacy of Dunces*, published by the LSU Press in 1980 (after it had been rejected by over forty commercial publishers).

Size and reputation

A press’s size and its reputation both can have an important impact on the kind of publishing program it undertakes. Here a direct contrast between Princeton and Penn State may be helpful because they differ significantly in these two respects. In 1990 Princeton published 205 new titles, the largest output that year for any American university press; Penn State issued 32, placing it within the smallest quartile (though toward the upper end). Princeton, founded in 1905, has long been regarded as one of the most prestigious academic publishers in the world; Penn State, founded in 1956, has acquired a solid reputation in a few fields—especially art history and literary criticism—but it is not yet regarded by many scholars outside those fields as having any special prestige attached to its imprint, and even within those fields Princeton would undoubtedly be considered the more prestigious publisher by most scholars. What effect does their different status have on these presses’ publishing programs?

Size makes a difference because a larger press with a more substantial backlist has a better chance of being able to generate a surplus over operating costs from sales and thus of being less dependent on external subsidies, either from its own university or from other sources. This gives it greater flexibility to undertake long-term, large-scale projects requiring a lot more capital investment than a small press can muster. Hence, Princeton could afford to take on the multivolume writings of Henry David Thoreau, the complete works of W. H. Auden, Kierkegaard’s writings, the papers of Thomas Jefferson and of Woodrow Wilson, and such hugely expensive single-volume projects as the *Atlas of Early American History* (printed in six colors), which would be well beyond the means of a press the size of Penn State.

Size also is partly the reason that not more presses are involved
in science publishing. Only twenty presses publish in the physical sciences, for instance, and only eleven in mathematics.\textsuperscript{27} Princeton is one of the very few presses that has invested significant effort in science publishing and maintained a program covering a broad range of the sciences. It can succeed in this area, as Penn State cannot hope to do (despite the strength of the university’s College of Science), for several reasons, almost all having to do with the greater financial resources at Princeton’s disposal. First, good listbuilding editors in science are scarce and, consequently, command higher salaries than editors in other fields; they also need large travel budgets because, with scientists not having the same incentives as scholars in the humanities and social sciences to write books, editors are obliged to track them down in their offices and labs and persuade them that writing a book can be a good use of their time. Second, as part of this effort at persuasion, editors are under pressure to offer sizable monetary advances against high royalty rates if they want to sign up the best authors; and yet many of these books put under contract (almost half, in my experience at Princeton) are never finally completed and submitted for publication, leaving the publisher with no possibility of making any return on the initial investment. Third, most science books contain a lot of technical matter that requires special skills of a copy editor and places extra demands on the production department; and the expectations of scientists who put a premium on speedy communication mean that their books usually have to be given faster schedules than other kinds of books. Finally, even if presses otherwise could afford to pay these high costs of science publishing, they would have to be prepared to face stiff competition from commercial publishers—Elsevier, Pergamon, Springer Verlag, and Wiley—that have large investments in scientific publishing, in both books and journals, and have more capital resources at their disposal than even the largest university presses.

The different rates of submission of manuscripts are also partly attributable to differences in size. With three times the number of acquiring editors, Princeton would naturally be expected to attract more manuscripts than Penn State. In 1988, 870 manuscripts were submitted to Princeton, down from a high of 1,147 in 1982; Penn State in 1990 handled 185 submissions. Interestingly, although Princeton and Penn State receive roughly the same proportion of unsolicited manuscripts, about 75 percent, the quality of those submitted over the transom at Penn State is significantly higher: over four times as many unsolicited manuscripts are accepted at Penn State as at Princeton.\textsuperscript{28}
This difference cannot be explained by any difference in the rigor of the review process at the two presses, which both operate similarly in this respect. My guess is that many more scholars, especially those early in their careers with dissertations to peddle, are attracted by Princeton’s prestige, whereas those who submit manuscripts to Penn State do so for special reasons besides the lure of the press’s imprint—because, for instance, they or their colleagues have appreciated the quality of personal attention and care their books have received at the press. As a result, the advantage that comes from having a manuscript solicited by Penn State does not seem so great as compared with a solicitation by Princeton: solicited manuscripts at Princeton are twice as likely to be accepted as submitted manuscripts overall, whereas the odds at Penn State only improve by 25 percent for solicited manuscripts. One benefit for Penn State in receiving fewer unsolicited manuscripts of lower quality is that less time is spent separating the wheat from the chaff and the sheer cost of processing manuscripts that will not bring any return on the investment of handling them is less than it is at Princeton.

The ability of a press to offer service of high quality is a function of size, too, in both negative and positive senses. Larger presses tend to have greater marketing capabilities, for instance, and here economies of scale can make a real difference in spreading costs over a large number of titles. What smaller presses lack in sheer economic clout and market presence, however, they can often make up for by, like Avis, “trying harder.” Tender, loving care—while certainly not absent in larger houses—is often easier to achieve in smaller houses where most attention can be devoted to individual titles across the board, not just the front list of lead titles. As Herbert S. Bailey, Jr., former director of Princeton University Press (1991, p. 2) says, “because publishing is such a personal activity, publishing houses need to be small” if they are to develop a distinctive style and offer the best of personalized service to their authors.

In a large house, which by necessity has to develop elaborate bureaucratic structures, more time is spent on paperwork and in staff meetings to accomplish the intricate coordination among the work of many people all involved with different aspects of publishing the same book, and less time is thus available to go the extra mile for an author and do the little things that make the experience of publishing truly satisfying and rewarding. Editors at large houses usually have a higher quota of books they are expected to get under contract than editors of small presses, and handling many titles hampers their ability to pay close personal
attention to any one of them. It also limits what they can do to oversee the coordination of work by staff in different departments, increasing the likelihood that some detail or other will be missed—a preference of the author not communicated to the designer, a book not sent to a particular convention or submitted in time for a certain award, and so on.\textsuperscript{31} Such coordination is easier to achieve more informally in a less bureaucratically encumbered organization, and this gives the smaller press an advantage in appealing to an author’s desire for the personal touch in publishing.\textsuperscript{32} While different from the prestige of the imprint, this kind of reputation can help a small press compete with much larger houses, especially when a monetary advance is not a major factor in an author’s decision.

The difference between these two kinds of reputation can explain an otherwise puzzling phenomenon: why a small press like Penn State can have a better chance of publishing a book for a senior than for a junior scholar. It is well known that tenure committees judge the significance of a book as much by the prestige of the publisher’s imprint as by the quality of the content, and the same book published at Princeton (or Harvard, Chicago, Yale, California, etc.) would be accorded higher marks than it would with the imprint of Penn State (or Fordham, Wayne State, Tennessee, Utah, etc.). Not surprisingly, therefore, the imprint is usually a much more important factor in a junior scholar’s decision about publication than it is for a senior scholar, who may place more weight on the quality of service a publisher can provide.\textsuperscript{33}

Strengths of the university

Deciding what to publish is more complicated in some ways for a university press than a commercial publisher because, in addition to the business considerations involved (costs of entry into a market, level of competition to be expected, etc.), a press is faced with interpreting its obligations to its parent university in making decisions about where to concentrate its editorial efforts. All presses to some degree feel a responsibility to reflect strengths of their universities’ faculty, but how far they go in making their list a mirror of their university differs considerably from press to press. No press, of course, can expect to publish in all fields encompassed within a university’s curriculum and still hope to survive as a business; success as a publisher requires specialization. And smaller presses cannot be expected, correspondingly, to represent as many of their universities’ strengths as larger ones.
The special difficulties of publishing in some fields limit what presses can do. Although the Penn State Press had tried fitfully for years to establish a program in science and engineering that would do justice to the university’s stake in those areas, it had failed to build any real momentum, for reasons that are easy to understand, as discussed above. As the new director, I knew it would be fruitless to make the effort again. At the same time, wanting to build the press’s list in the social sciences and history, I saw an opportunity to do worthwhile publishing about science rather than in science by developing a list of studies in the interdisciplinary field of “science, technology, and society,” where the university has long been a leader with its highly regarded Science, Technology and Society Program.

Intellectual trends have their own dynamic and can lead a press to enter a field even when its own university is not especially outstanding in it. The development of Latin American studies at Princeton described earlier is a good example. Among area studies at the university it was not the strongest or best known, yet the directions in which social science theory was moving made it sensible for the press to concentrate its editorial energies there. It is only fair to point out, however, that the press is also a leading publisher in Middle Eastern and East Asian studies, areas in which Princeton University is preeminent.

While it is generally true, then, that a university press’s list will be strong in many of the same areas in which its parent university’s faculty is strong, the pressures of succeeding as a business enterprise as well as the attractions of exciting new intellectual developments will tend to make the correspondence between the two less than one-to-one.

Backlist and tradition

The investment that a press has already made in building a list in a particular field is a major determinant of editorial decisions. As Walter Powell (1985) says, “when editors are in the process of signing books, the list that is already in print will impose its own logic on them, in both obvious and imperceptible ways”(p. 153).

Marketing considerations are an important factor here. Continuing a strong list in a certain field provides the opportunity, with the advertising of new titles, to do more promotion of the backlist, which helps to keep those older titles selling steadily over many years. But editorial considerations are equally important: once one has gained momentum in a field, it takes much less effort to
sustain it than it does to invest time and energy in entering a field where the press has not published before.

When I arrived at Penn State, the press had a well-developed list in both art history and literary criticism as well as a growing list in religious studies. With an experienced editor already hard at work in these fields, it only made sense to continue building the press’s program in these areas. Outside these fields, the press’s list was quite thin; there were titles scattered across a wide range of fields in history, the social sciences, and other areas of the humanities as well as in science and engineering.

Given the press’s size, it could not expect to publish successfully in all of these fields in the future, so decisions had to be made to bring more focus to the program. The move into studies in science, technology, and society has already been explained. My familiarity with philosophy, political science, and sociology as well as Latin American studies made it sensible to focus on these fields, and the press already had some backlist in all of these areas. I hired an editor from Wesleyan University Press to take charge of list building in history and to help out with some of the social sciences. His expertise in medieval religious history gave us a quick entree into that field. It soon became apparent that the three of us had sufficiently overlapping interests to make it natural for us to cooperate in various interdisciplinary fields, such as women’s studies. And because the focus of our existing lists in art history and literary criticism were already strongly American and European, it was logical to concentrate our efforts in history and the social sciences along these geographical lines, too—with Latin American studies, because of that area’s strong historical ties with Europe and America, being a perfect complement to this focus.

One way in which we sought to strengthen the interdisciplinary orientation of our list was by launching a number of series: “Literature and Philosophy” will help build bridges between those two fields for us, while “Hermeneutics: Studies in the History of Religions” will bring our efforts in history and religious studies more closely into relation with each other. Series for many presses are a major vehicle for focusing the list and providing a steady stream of submissions. Series editors, as Walter Powell (1985) points out, can even play a role for presses “that is in certain respects equivalent to the role of literary agents in trade publishing” (p. 50). Some presses prefer organizing their lists along the lines of series more than other presses do, but every press has at least a few series that over time help create an identity for its list and become a part of its tradition.
Another element of a press's tradition can influence editorial decision making, too. Those presses that publish journals (currently, thirty-nine of the U.S. presses that are regular members of the AAUP) have an additional incentive to bring out books that complement their journal publications. The existence of the *Journal of Policy History* at Penn State was a major reason why the press decided to begin publishing books in policy history; indeed, a series was launched in 1992 to make available paperbacks for course adoption in conjunction with the journal's publication of a special thematic issue every year. At Princeton the success of *Philosophy and Public Affairs* led eventually to establishing a series of books called "Studies in Moral, Political, and Legal Philosophy" edited by the journal's editor, Marshall Cohen. All of the journals at Princeton and at Penn State, too, are now closely integrated with the book publishing program. In 1991 Penn State added two journals in American literature (one of them also in women's studies) in part because of the effort under way to build the press's list of book titles in American studies. This symbiosis between book and journal publishing is especially visible at those presses that publish fewer than a dozen journals, but it even exists to some extent at the houses with major journals operations, like Chicago and Johns Hopkins.

Background and interests of the director

The educational training and the special interests that editors have, naturally enter into their listbuilding plans and decisions. At Princeton, for instance, I got the press involved for the first time in a sustained way in publishing in philosophy because that was the field I knew best from my own undergraduate and graduate training, and the press was wise enough to take advantage of it.\(^{34}\) When I moved to Penn State, it was natural to continue acquiring in philosophy for this reason alone—but also because the university has a strong Philosophy Department and the press already was publishing two journals in philosophy edited by members of the department. Editors when they move carry their networks with them, and presses who hire them do so in part because of the benefit these connections bring.

That I came to Penn State as the new director made my background and interests all the more determinative of the directions the press would take editorially. Indeed, since the vast majority of directors at presses spent their earlier careers as editors (unlike the heads of commercial houses, who today more often come from
backgrounds in business, law, or marketing), it is only reasonable to expect that their editorial tastes will have a great deal to do with what their presses publish. Princeton has a major commitment to science publishing in large part because its director from 1954 to 1986, Herbert S. Bailey, Jr., was science editor before he became director; and his crowning achievement as director was to launch the project to publish in some fifty volumes the complete works of Albert Einstein (Bailey, 1989). (Surely one reason that not more presses are involved in science publishing is that few press directors have had any direct exposure to science.) Bailey’s successor at Princeton, Walter Lippincott, is an opera lover—and now the press not only publishes books on opera but has a series devoted to it. And if you look at the presses that have strong programs in poetry, you will find many of the directors to be poets themselves—Paul Zimmer at Iowa and Miller Williams at Arkansas, for example.

Policies and procedures of the editorial board

Enough has already been written about the role that the faculty editorial board plays to require little additional comment here (Parsons 1989a; Goellner 1990a). Paul Parsons (1989b, p. 200) usefully points out how the tendency of editorial boards to be conservative (because membership on them is usually reserved for senior scholars) is counterbalanced by editors’ desire to position their presses at the cutting edge of the advance of scholarship. As a first approximation to reality, this is a valid observation, but it glosses over some of the subtleties of editorial board operations.

At Princeton a tradition initiated by one editorial board continued for many years: giving explicit recognition to what were called “risk” books, which were seen to depart in various ways from the model of the standard scholarly monograph but were regarded as sufficiently well grounded in scholarship to merit publication by a university press even though, in some respects, they were more like trade books. Julian Simon’s The Ultimate Resource (1981), an attack on the arguments of the ecological doomsayers like Paul Ehrlich, who so dominated public discourse in the 1970s, was treated as a risk book by Princeton’s editorial board, which recognized it to be based on Simon’s more academic research, some of it previously published by the press in The Economics of Population Growth (1977). The risk here partly had to do with the ideological and political uses to which the book could be put (and Simon did become a favorite with neoconservative groups) and also with its direct challenge to some of the academic schol-
arship emanating from Princeton’s own Office of Population Research (various members of whose faculty made their displeasure known to the university’s administration after the book was published). If this was conservatism on the part of Princeton’s editorial board, it was not such in the sense that it constrained the press in any way from publishing a controversial book. (While issuing some titles of a neoconservative persuasion, the press was also busily building up a reputation during this period of being a leading publisher of Marxist-influenced scholarship.)

Its openness to taking risks of this kind, however, was not for a while reflected in its approach to feminist studies. One major book by a feminist philosopher, which went on to establish itself as an early classic in the field, was rejected by the editorial board (consisting entirely of male faculty at this time) even after a third report specifically requested by the board recommended publication, as had two earlier readers enthusiastically. That was the most blatant exercise of prejudice I can recall from all of my years in scholarly publishing—and the author has never forgotten it!

This occurred during the time when Princeton was acquiring its bad reputation for turning down well-supported manuscripts at the last stage. Because of the surfeit of books on its agenda and the quota of acceptances that it was being asked to enforce, the editorial board adopted a special procedure whereby all projects not approved by consensus on the first pass through the agenda (which could take several hours of intensive discussion to reach) would be bundled for reconsideration at the end. The members of the board would then rank-order their preferences for manuscripts in the bundle, and the final selection up to the limit of the quota would proceed accordingly. As it happened, this procedure—adopted by necessity given the framework for decision making imposed on the board—exacerbated the tendency of board members to allow their own biases free reign and heightened the role of subjectivity in the whole process.

Policies and procedures like these, not usually visible to observers outside a press, can play a significant role not only in determining what kinds of books get published but also how decisions about them are reached.

Conditions and Changes in the External Environment

University presses simultaneously inhabit two worlds, the world of higher education and the world of publishing, and conditions and changes in these wider environments can have an effect on
what presses publish that is often as influential as their own internal character and their relationship with their parent university. Any thorough discussion of these environments would fill many pages, but at least we can point here to some of the main sources of external influence and the way in which such influence manifests itself in presses' editorial programs.

Declining markets

Sales to libraries have always been the solid base on which the economics of scholarly book publishing rests, but that base has been eroding rapidly over the past twenty-five years. In the late sixties, the ratio of expenditures on books compared with journals was 2:1, but even by the mid-1970s it had dropped to 1:1 and has been continuing to decline since then as the prices of journals, primarily in scientific and technical fields, have soared to levels that are finally beginning to provoke librarians into canceling subscriptions.35

The effect of this trend on the market for scholarly monographs has been devastating. For example, at Princeton, hardback books that were on average selling 1,660 copies over a five-year period as of 1969 were only selling 931 copies by 1986—a decline of 44 percent. Between 1985 and 1990, a recent study shows, the purchase of monographs by major research libraries dropped by 16 percent, or nearly $23 million (Okerson & Stubbs, 1991, p. 36). With manufacturing costs rising steadily, exerting upward pressure on prices, presses have found themselves in a bind: although buying by libraries is not very price-sensitive, buying by individuals is, and presses realize that faculty salaries and graduate fellowships have not kept pace with inflation sufficiently to make offsetting lost sales to libraries possible through sharp price increases without affecting sales to individuals.

Most U.S. presses have resisted the temptation to which European academic publishers long ago succumbed to forget about sales to individuals and just charge exorbitant prices to libraries to cover costs on very small print runs. They have therefore responded to this cost-price squeeze by trying to effect savings in production through use of computer technology (the misnamed "desktop publishing"), placing more emphasis on publishing shorter books, diversifying the mix of books on their lists, seeking to expand their search for subsidies from external sources, and—if all else fails—withdraw from some fields of scholarly publication altogether where the market is not large enough to sustain minimally accept-
able sales. Signs of this latter trend, leading to endangered species in scholarly publishing, are already beginning to appear and will surely intensify over the coming decade. Fields particularly in jeopardy include literary criticism, music, African studies, and European history.

Conglomeratization in commercial publishing

While university presses were watching their sales to libraries decline, as larger percentages of library budgets went to maintaining subscriptions to expensive scientific and technical journals issued mostly by commercial houses, mergers among large companies in the communications industry, both domestically (such as Time and Warner) and internationally (such as the Bertelsmann takeover of Bantam/Doubleday/Dell), were changing the face of commercial book publishing. Corporate pressures increased for houses to find and milk for all their worth blockbuster books by the best-known authors (Stephen King, Danielle Steel, Bill Cosby, etc.), who commanded ever greater monetary advances. Writers of first novels, poetry, and serious nonfiction works with less than spectacular sales potential found less of a welcome than ever at the houses that had been absorbed in these media conglomerates (including many of the traditionally distinguished houses like Scribner’s and Knopf) and turned in increasing numbers to university presses as well as to the newly emerging and robust so-called independent publishers.

This development helped presses in their efforts to diversify their lists, and many more presses began publishing fiction and general trade books than ever had before. Some press directors sought to justify this diversification by reinterpreting their mandate as giving university-based publishing a much more expansive cultural role than it had traditionally borne. Sharp disagreements continue to exist within the university press community over the publishing of fiction, and to a lesser extent poetry (partly because poetry was entrenched within press publishing programs much earlier than general fiction publishing was), but almost all presses have come to appreciate the opportunity to do more publishing of the kind of midlist trade book that commercial houses have been rapidly abandoning. The appeal of these new areas of publishing, however, carries with it the danger that presses will give lesser priority to the publication of scholarly monographs, adding further to the problem of endangered species (Thatcher, 1990).
Competition among presses

As commercial publishers have cut back on their publication of middlist titles, competition among university presses for them has intensified, further reinforcing a trend that already was beginning to manifest itself by the mid-1970s. One possible explanation for this rise in competitiveness among presses is the increase in the number of press directors who began their careers in commercial publishing; for example, the current directors at California, Princeton, and Yale all got their start in the 1960s working in the college department of Harper and Row.

Whatever the cause, the effects of heightened competition on the traditional way of doing business in university press publishing have been substantial. Use of advance and conditional contracts has proliferated, meaning that offers are more often being made when only partial manuscripts, or manuscripts in need of major revision, or sometimes even just outlines are submitted for review. Presses have more and more resorted to special enticements to lure authors away from competitors—enticements such as high royalty rates, monetary advances, fast production schedules, expensive design (such as four-color jackets), extra (especially major media) promotion, simultaneous paperback publication, and so on. Presses, too, have opened themselves up to multiple submission of manuscripts, a practice common in commercial book publishing but once very rare in university press publishing (and still anathema for most professional journals). Whether competition has actually resulted in an erosion of scholarly standards and rigor in the review process is a debatable point, but there can be no question that it has exacted a toll in the waste of scarce resources: only one press can win, and all the time and money that losing presses expend subtract from the resources available for them to publish other books.

Conditions in academia

Many aspects of academic life impinge on the activities of presses, and a whole chapter alone could be devoted to this topic. But a few points especially pertinent to the activities of listbuilding editors are worth making here. Every editor is aware that one can no longer concentrate just on the most prestigious, elite universities in the search for good manuscripts. It may continue to be true that the best authors of academic books receive their graduate training at the top research universities, but owing to the squeeze on jobs during
the 1970s and 1980s, the graduates of these institutions were obliged to find work wherever they could, and many ended up at relatively obscure colleges in out-of-the-way places or even abandoned academia altogether in favor of more secure, better-paying jobs in government, business, or law—where some have nevertheless remained intent on writing and publishing important works of scholarship.  

Perhaps partly because of this dispersion, and also a growing awareness among college administrators of faculty’s needs for publishing support, it has become more common for universities without presses of their own to provide subsidies for authors from their faculty to help them get their books published; and even some universities that do have presses make such subsidies available to their faculty who publish elsewhere. As the problem of endangered species becomes more acute and subsidies are more often required as a condition of publication, it is likely that authors from institutions that have such policies in place will have an advantage in securing contracts over authors at campuses where no support of this kind is forthcoming.

Finally, it needs to be emphasized how sensitive presses are to trends in academic life. Probably the most extraordinary example in recent times is the rapid growth of presses’ interest in publishing in women’s studies. As Paul Parsons (1991) notes, “remarkably, after only two decades of intensive intellectual pursuit, women’s studies is now the second-leading area of specialization at university presses,” with fully 78 percent of presses having programs in the field (pp. 45, 47). African-American studies, once very active in the early 1970s before going into a decade-long eclipse, has recently rebounded, in part because of the general movement toward emphasizing the value of multiculturalism in college curricula.

Foundations

The earlier interest in black and ethnic studies in general was attributable in part to the encouragement provided to the field by substantial financial backing from the Ford Foundation. This is just one of many examples of the key role that foundation funding has played in setting the intellectual agenda for higher education and, in turn, stimulating the production of books for presses to publish. The turn away from African toward Latin American studies, mentioned earlier, is another example; a number of foundations, Tinker and Howard Heinz in particular, have been pri-
mary supporters of research on Latin America over the years. The Getty grant program has been crucial to the vitality of research and publishing in art history. And the Japan Foundation in 1989 launched a program of awards administered by the AAUP to foster the publication by presses of more books about Japan. Some foundations, notably Mellon, have even given substantial grants directly to individual presses to help subsidize publications in the humanities, but in recent times, Mellon and other foundations have not shown much inclination to continue this kind of support.

Government

Like foundations, government agencies have been sometimes indispensable sources of support for publishing projects undertaken by university presses. The papers of Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Adams, and others could not have been made available in meticulously edited and elegantly produced series without the backing of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. The project to publish the complete works of Albert Einstein at Princeton would have gone nowhere without major funding from the National Science Foundation. The National Endowment for the Arts has provided both matching grant funds and individual title subsidies to help those presses involved in the publishing of poetry and fiction. And the National Endowment for the Humanities has been a crucial player for many years in enabling presses to publish many first-rate monographs in all areas of the humanities, including history and the more humanistically oriented branches of the social sciences.

Changes in government programs can also make a significant difference in what university presses publish, however. The NEH, for instance, moved in 1988 from subsidizing scholarly monographs with low sales potential, providing grants of different amounts in relation to the financial requirements of each title, to emphasizing works of broader public interest by offering a standard grant of $7,000 to each title approved for support. It appears from evidence to date that presses are not radically altering the kinds of books they are seeking NEH support for, and therefore the change in NEH's criteria is having only a limited impact. Still, by this shift NEH is not perceived as helping with the problem of endangered species but only contributing to making it worse.

All of the foregoing examples have referred to the role of the U.S. government. But increasingly significant, too, is the role that foreign governments have begun to play in fostering and subsi-
dizing publication of books about their own country's history and culture. A number of governments—French, German, and Italian—are active in providing support for translation into English of works originally published in those languages. Even more ambitious is the program that the Spanish Ministry of Culture launched in 1984; besides subsidizing translations, it offers grants to presses to help with publication of any books having to do with Spain's heritage, including books about colonial Latin America. The existence of this program was one important factor in our decision at the Penn State Press to begin a new series of Penn State Studies in Romance Literatures, and so far four books in the series have received subsidies from the program. The availability of foreign government funding of this kind will likely have a considerable influence on where presses concentrate their efforts, and no one will be surprised if more books are published on Spain than on other European countries in the future.

The internationalization of publishing

While interactions with foreign governments are increasingly important in this way, so too are relationships with foreign publishers. In commercial publishing, many of the mergers have brought houses based in different countries under the umbrella of conglomerates with operations extending worldwide. Bertelsmann, the world's largest publishing company, for example, has 48,780 employees scattered over thirty countries. One effect has been to stimulate editors at houses in different countries to cooperate with each other on projects to publish books simultaneously in several languages.

Although this phenomenon has not yet been much in evidence at university presses, there is greater activity than ever in copublishing, especially between U.S. and British publishers. In fact, Penn State owes much of its early success in establishing visibility quickly in history and the social sciences to the close working relationship it has developed with Polity Press in Cambridge, England, which is undoubtedly one of the leading commercial publishers of academic books in the world today, with a list representing the best and most exciting work of European scholarship. The prominence of Minnesota's list in literary theory, feminist studies, and Continental philosophy also owes much to its connection with Polity.

Just now we are beginning to see signs of the emergence of scholarly publishing along traditional university press lines in
Eastern Europe. The University of Nebraska Press contributed to the launching of a press at Charles University in Prague, Czechoslovakia, by arranging for Apple to donate computer equipment and providing training in how to use it in a publishing operation (Wanek, 1990/91). As ties are forged between new presses in this part of the world and American presses, we can expect cooperation in editorial activities to follow.

Computer technology

Not only is computer technology helping presses in Eastern Europe to get off the ground, it also has since the early 1980s revolutionized the way publishing is carried out in this country. Business operations were the first to benefit, with the availability of sophisticated spreadsheet and database programs, but computerization has since spread into nearly every aspect of publishing, from editing and design to marketing and royalty payments, not only saving money but also contributing greatly to efficiency and productivity. Our designer at Penn State, for instance, estimates that with the help of computers in designing jackets he has been able to produce better designs in half of the time. Now that almost all authors are producing their manuscripts on word processors, some presses like Princeton have developed the capability to take floppy disks from authors, edit them on screen, enter formatting codes, and use them to drive typesetting equipment.

All of these uses of computers have helped presses provide better service to authors. Still in its infancy, however, is actual electronic publishing at university presses. Oxford University Press established an Electronic Publishing Division a few years ago to begin making available some of its major reference works, such as the Oxford English Dictionary, in computer-readable form. In 1991 Columbia University Press issued its Granger's World of Poetry as a CD-ROM. Other such projects, probably with emphasis on reference works to begin with, will be undertaken at an increasing number of presses in years to come, though the scarcity of capital resources available to presses will limit the extent to which they can enter this field and compete effectively with commercial publishers. Most likely, presses will start to develop relationships with commercial firms that can convert to electronic form and market the copyrighted materials that presses license them to produce and distribute. Already there is a company called Context Editions at work in creating electronic data bases of the critical editions of the writings of the classic philosophers; negotiations for inputting
editions of Spinoza's and Hume's works was under way at Princeton before I left.

The Future

In less than a decade, advances in computer technology, combined with other recent innovations, such as the fax machine and the rapid growth of the Internet, have opened up possibilities for overhauling the entire system of scholarly communication. Some librarians have latched onto technology as a means of salvation for their problems, especially for spiraling costs of subscriptions to scientific and technical journals, and have envisioned a restructured system in which commercial publishers would be left out or given a much reduced role. One of the outspoken advocates of this change, Patricia Battin, said in 1984: "The electronic revolution provides the potential for developing university controlled publishing enterprises through scholarly networks supported either by individual institutions of consortia" (p. 175). The Association of Research Libraries is currently "encouraging experimentation with electronic journals and new technologies" operated by groups of scholars connected through university computer networks like BITNET (Okerson & Stubbs 1991, p. 37). Even more visionary is the hope of creating "a single electronic database that includes all edited and refereed scholarly publication" linked to "the National Research and Education Network currently under development in the United States" (Smith, 1991, pp. 88–89; see also Smith, 1992).

What such visions of a brave new world of scholarly communication usually overlook is the question of "who will keep the gates?" Patricia Battin (1984) did give some recognition to this concern when she admitted, "the lacking ingredient is the organizational capacity for on-line refereeing, editing, and distribution, as well as the necessary modifications in the process of assessing publications for promotion and tenure"(p. 175). This question of gatekeeping is one that must be confronted by those who see electronic technology as making possible direct scholar-to-scholar exchange of information, perhaps with the library as intermediary offering bibliographical assistance and access to some major textual databases."7

It is the university press that has traditionally performed this function, through its careful screening of submitted proposals and manuscripts and the elaborate review procedures it undertakes to make sure that what is published has been validated as a genu-
inently significant contribution to knowledge. If technology is viewed as cost-saving because it makes possible elimination of the role of the traditional publisher, then how does one take care of the problem of separating what is worth disseminating from what is merely disseminated? As Kenneth Boulding has pointed out, "We must be very careful not to confuse information with knowledge. In many respects, information is the enemy of knowledge. Piling information on information merely produces noise." At least with print publishing there is now a system in place that helps scholars distinguish knowledge from information. And, as argued above, the publishing process at university presses, beginning with the multifaceted role of the listbuilding editor, provides significant value added to the work of scholars that would be lost in a system of direct scholar-to-scholar electronic communication.

With all that said, however, there is no doubt that we are entering a period when major changes in the system of scholarly communication will have to be made, in response not only to the challenges of computer technology but also to such increasing problems as those affecting endangered species. A hint of what is to come is provided in a letter sent to me in 1991 by a former member of Princeton's editorial board, Lionel Gossman, with which it seems appropriate to conclude:

I have advocated for a long time that those of us who cannot or do not wish to enter the university press system ought to work out a way of communicating our ideas using the many reproduction opportunities—desktop publishing, I guess—now available. We shouldn't need all that expensive production anyway in order to reach a couple of hundred people in the world who might be interested in reading us. And things do get around using informal circuits. If a highly specialized paper had something in it of more general interest, I am fairly confident that there are informal networks of communication out there that would ensure its dissemination. The presses themselves might benefit from such a system, since they would be able to pick up for more elegant production and more effective distribution work that had already proven itself, as it were, in the cheap, informal circuit. A change of this kind wouldn't necessarily make it harder to get tenure. People (not only tenure committees but individual scholars) might become less fixated on the Book, which would be a good thing all round, and more attention might be paid to the substance of a scholar's work than to the material form in which it appeared. Above all, we would be rid of the
artificial constraints of the book (which the scientists have never had to endure) and free to invent the forms of communication that seem most appropriate to what we have to say.

Notes

1. A parallel can be noted with faculty appointments: the "stars" in any field are few, competition for them intense, and a department expanding rapidly cannot reasonably expect to succeed in capturing very many of them.

2. Powell provides some examples of serendipity experienced by these publishers' editors on page 94. This element of luck is one reason why he describes the decision-making process in scholarly publishing as a variety of semirational behavior known among organizational theorists as "loose coupling."

3. Walter Powell (1985) quotes publishing industry historian John Tebbel as observing that "the widely used term 'acquisitions editor' is an indicator that today's editors seldom edit" (p. 11). Powell goes on to say (pp. 11–12):

Editors used to be generalists who did everything. Now the time of an acquisitions editor is considered too valuable to be spent working with an author. In the past, editors read manuscripts, worked with authors, assisted them, and edited their manuscripts to whatever extent was required. Today's editors spend much more time talking, arranging deals, and consulting with lawyers, corporate managers, and marketing and subsidiary-rights directors. This not only signals a power shift within publishing houses—one in which editors are on the decline and others are in ascendance; it has also led to a restructuring of the relationship between authors and editors.

As we shall see, this description does not apply, in nearly the same measure, to university press editors who still operate free of many of the pressures that burden their commercial colleagues. For current comments on the neglect of editing by acquiring editors in commercial publishing today, see Weisberg (1991). This article produced a storm of controversy; some of the reactions appear in The New Republic from July 15 and 22 under the heading "Revenge of the Book People." See also the more nuanced and illuminating piece by the veteran editor Ted Solotaroff (1991), who helps place Weisberg's article in context of the evolution of commercial publishing in recent years. As Solotaroff says, Weisberg's "indictment of publishers and editors is about 60 percent right and 60 percent wrong. He has got the crime—the decline of editorial standards—mostly right but the perpetrators and motive mostly wrong. . . . He has missed virtually all of the extenuating circumstances,
not to mention the distinctions, comparisons and conflicts, that form the real interest and drama of the case” (p. 399).


5. In a letter to me dated May 25, 1983, Princeton political scientist Henry S. Bienen (now dean of the Woodrow Wilson School there) elaborated on these reasons:

The turn away from Africa has been caused by many things. There is the inhospitality to research by host governments as you mention. There is the drying up of Ford Foundation and other funds. There is the depressing reality after the utopian hopes of the 1960s. Also, Latin America, it is thought, can teach us more about our own past and Latin American studies can be informed by our understanding of European and American histories. And, the USA has had deeper economic and political involvements in Latin America. Thus people who wanted to explore these involvements are drawn to Latin America.

6. Unlike some of my fellow editors at university presses, I have always looked favorably on dissertations as potentially good books. They frequently need significant revision to realize their potential, it is true, but the effort is often worth making. Compared with authors who hold down full-time teaching jobs and have many administrative responsibilities as well, not to mention families to take care of, writers of dissertations can concentrate virtually all of their time and effort on this single project; what they may lack in maturity of judgment or range of vision, they can make up for by the intensity and depth of their research, including often very richly rewarding field work (if they are social scientists). The image dissertations have of being dull, dry, and too narrow to interest anyone besides the author’s thesis committee is belied by the success of such books as Evans’s, which sold over one thousand in hardback and seventeen thousand in paperback in ten years—a sale that would delight any commercial scholarly publisher.


8. This happened in the case of the work by a feminist philoso-
pher cited below in the section on policies and procedures of the editorial board.


11. This letter was written on June 16, 1977, and submitted to Robert Gottlieb of Knopf as part of my application for the Tony Godwin Memorial Award in that year.


13. It is in large part this exposure to intellectual currents in other disciplines that explains why faculty who serve on press editorial boards frequently cite this experience as the most rewarding of any they have in doing committee work for their university.

14. Comparison of political philosophy as done by analytic philosophers in Philosophy and Public Affairs and by political scientists in Political Theory will immediately reveal the differences in the two disciplines' approaches.

15. The decision not to pursue publication of Rorty's collection was made in the context of a new program, "Princeton Series of Collected Essays," that the press was promoting at the time whereby previously published essays by well-known scholars would be photoreproduced from their original printed source, the object being to make these collections of essays available to students in relatively inexpensive paperback format. Since this method of publication made revision of the essays impossible and Rorty wanted to revise some of his essays before republication, the series could not accommodate his collection. In such manner can press policies lead to unwise decisions!

16. See Peter Laslett's introduction to his edited volume Philosophy, Politics, and Society (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957) wherein appears the since oft-quoted statement: "For the moment, anyway, political philosophy is dead." Compare the more upbeat introduction he and W. G. Runciman wrote for the second volume in this series, published in 1962, where they remark that already "the mood is very different and very much more favorable than it was six years ago"—although the volume begins with an essay by Isaiah Berlin entitled "Does Political Theory Still Exist?"

17. Rawls's work was, for me, the "big one that got away." Rawls earned his Ph.D. at Princeton and had close connections with people in the Philosophy Department there. Moreover, he was one of four Princeton-connected philosophers I had approached early in my efforts to build the press's list in philosophy with an invitation to publish a collection of his essays. (The others were Joel Feinberg, Stuart Hampshire, and Gregory Vlastos—all former teachers of mine at
Princeton—for each of whom the press did publish a collection.) Rawls begged off because he was in the final stages of completing his Theory of Justice and did not want to take time away from it to devote to preparing a collection. My efforts to persuade him to submit that work to Princeton nearly succeeded, and I was later told that Harvard’s editor-in-chief had to get on her hands and knees and plead with Rawls to give his book to Harvard. Harvard had the advantage of proximity, which was important to Rawls, who had a reputation for constant fine-tuning of his work and might well have wanted to insert changes in proofs at the very last minute. Also, it must be admitted, I was still very much a junior editor at the time, with the results of my efforts in acquisitions only just then beginning to show themselves in print, and Rawls had little visible evidence to see of how strong a program in philosophy Princeton would come to develop. Rawls’s Harvard colleague, Robert Nozick, also a Princeton Ph.D., was another philosopher I courted in those early years, hoping to get his Anarchy, State, and Utopia (1974), which subsequently won a National Book Award; but his close personal relationship with the editor of Basic Books made that also an ultimately fruitless effort.

18. If Walter Powell’s testimony is to be believed, this is not an activity that comes naturally to editors. “Editors,” he claims, “are structurally conditioned not to pay much attention to books that are currently being released” (1985, p. 57).


20. On the advantages that accrue to publishers from authors’ loyalty, see Powell (1985, pp. 50, 156, 181). For comments on the particular problem that can arise when author loyalty conflicts with house loyalty, see Powell (1985: p. 76.)

21. Princeton University Press is an exception, unique in this country to my knowledge, in being a separately constituted corporation, linked with its university only through the representation of faculty, administrators, and alumni on its board of trustees and through the control that its faculty editorial board exerts over use of the university’s imprint. Penn State Press is more typical in its being positioned as a unit within the university’s graduate school to whose dean I as director of the press report.

22. Some presses suffer from the misfortune of being regarded as auxiliary services on a par with the university bookstore, which is expected to pay its own way entirely from income generated by sales. Harvard University Press’s director, for instance, used to report to the vice president for grounds and buildings, and this awkward placement within the university’s bureaucracy had the effect of generating a lot of friction that led to the firing of the press’s director in 1970.
23. Presses at public universities are more exposed to the vagaries of state politics than presses at private universities, and the legislatures in some states have even been known to wield a heavy hand directly in the funding of presses at their state universities, which has required defensive lobbying by the presses' directors.

24. One exception is Syracuse University Press, which publishes "New York Classics."

25. Despite its strong regional appeal, Joe Paterno's book about his life as Penn State's football coach was not published by the Penn State Press but by Random House.


28. The comparisons here and in the rest of this paragraph are based on data for Princeton covering the years 1971–1982 and for Penn State covering just the year 1990. I have no reason to believe that data for the remaining years of the 1980s for Princeton, if compiled, would show any significant differences from what is reported here.

29. F. James Davis, author of the prize-winning Who Is Black? One Nation's Definition (1991), explained to me that one reason he submitted his manuscript over the transom to Penn State was that his colleague in the Sociology Department at Illinois State University, Richard Stivers, had had a good experience with the press in publishing his book A Hair of the Dog: Irish Drinking and American Stereotype (1976).

30. For comment on some diseconomies of scale in publishing, see Powell (1985, p. 21).

31. I experienced the difference dramatically in moving from Princeton, where in my final year I signed up fifty-one titles, to Penn State, where I have been acquiring about fifteen titles a year. (Of course, as director, I have much else to do besides acquire new books.) Most university press editors handle about twenty-five titles a year all the way through to signing of a contract. Powell (1985, p. 222) cites a range of between twenty-five and thirty-five titles as "a rough average of the annual work load for the senior editors" at the two commercial scholarly publishing houses he studied. There are presses, however, where the expected productivity is much higher: at Cambridge University Press, which issues around 1,000 books annually, I am told that editors are supposed to acquire fifty titles a year.

32. Walter Powell (1985) notes that "part of the success of the small, more specialized houses is due to the declining quality of author–publisher relations in the larger houses, along with the exceptionally high rejection rate for manuscripts that is characteristic of almost any publishing house of significant size" (p. 19).

33. Walter Powell (1985) notes some other ways in which a publisher's "prestige is a valuable currency." It is particularly important to the fortunes of books by little-known authors. The books of highly visible
scholars are typically sent out for review regardless of who their publisher is. But when the book review editor does not know an author's work, the prestige of the publisher can be a major factor in whether or not the book receives a review (p. 206). Not only are book review editors influenced by the imprint, but also "librarians and booksellers often base their decisions about which new books to order on a publisher's editorial and marketing reputation" (p. 218).

34. This experience of mine, as well as the advantage his training in medieval history has given our history editor at Penn State in getting off to a fast start, leads me to question Walter Powell's claim that "knowledge of a particular discipline . . . does not seem to be a particularly valued asset in scholarly publishing" (1985, p. 57). But it is true that such knowledge is not a prerequisite for success. At Princeton, my classmate Edward Tenner enjoyed a very successful career as science editor at the press even though he got his Ph.D. in the field of German labor history.

35. For data on library expenditures on books and journals covering the period 1969–1973, see Fry and White (1975), especially page 61 for the change in the ratio. The ratio for Penn State's Pattee Library for 1991/92 is 1:4. Okerson and Stubbs (1991) note that serials prices rose by 51 percent over the period from 1985–86 to 1989–90; they also report on some of the trends toward cancellation of subscriptions now under way. Among members of the Association of Research Libraries, 52 percent indicated in response to a survey in late 1990 that they have already begun to reduce their journals subscriptions. The University of California at Berkeley, for example, has canceled subscriptions amounting to more than $400,000 in recent years. Penn State announced early in 1993 that its library had canceled about eight hundred subscriptions worth over $200,000 for the current fiscal year.

36. For discussion of this looming crisis, see Thatcher (1990).

37. The increasingly important role played by the independents is emphasized by Joseph Barbato in a letter to the New York Times on April 9, 1990, in which he observed: "Serious American book publishing is no longer the sole domain of Random House and other major trade houses. Last year, Publishers Weekly . . . gave its Carey-Thomas Awards for creative publishing not to multi-million-dollar conglomerates, but to Thunder's Mouth Press, Curbstone Press, Seal Press, and Eridanos Press—small publishers devoted to alternative fiction, Latin American writing, feminist literature, and foreign literary classics." The contribution the independents could make was enhanced further when the Mellon Foundation gave grants of $50,000 to each of nine small literary presses in December 1990 and the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund followed in March 1991 by awarding a $3 million grant to help such presses develop their marketing programs. See Publishers Weekly, March 22, 1991, p. 11.


40. The results of an extensive survey of the competitive practices of university presses are reported in Thatcher (1980).

41. For some observations about the practice of multiple submissions, see Powell (1985, p. 229), who points out: “But unpublished authors must recognize that, if they choose to send their manuscripts to many houses at once, they are probably hurting their chances of publication at each individual house.”

42. Authors of books submitted for approval by the editorial board of the Penn State Press at one meeting not long ago included scholars based at the Memorial University of Newfoundland, Rocky Mountain College, Butler University, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and Western Louisiana University. Scholars not affiliated with universities with whom I have worked include Nicole Ball (then at the National Security Archives), Louis Fisher (of the Congressional Research Service), Joel Goldstein (a lawyer), Pedro-Pablo Kuczynski (president of the First Boston investment banking house), Joan Nelson (of the Overseas Development Council), William Odom (a military attache at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow at the time, later director of the National Security Agency), and Andrew Pierre (then at the Council on Foreign Relations).

43. Before the change in NEH’s criteria, however, I would not have considered applying for a subsidy for a book with trade potential like Thomas Sowell’s forthcoming Race and Culture, which was awarded an NEH grant in 1991 (but won’t be published at Penn State owing to a dispute with the author over copyediting of his manuscript).


45. For details of this project, see Publishers Weekly, June 7, 1991, p. 41.


47. Some librarians have been trying to persuade their colleagues that providing access to information wherever it can be obtained is the role that university libraries should be seeking to fulfill now, rather than continuing to develop collections of materials on site. For two statements from advocates of this philosophy of librarianship, see
Dougherty (1991) and Gherman (1991). According to Gherman, "the bottom line is that we will be spending more of our budgets for access to information and less on ownership of information."

48. See also Atkinson (1992) for a vision of the librarian's role in the age of the "electronic library."

49. For more about the future of scholarly publishing as it faces these challenges and problems, see two articles I wrote after this essay (Thatcher, 1992, 1993a) and also a long interview I had with two Penn State librarians in April 1992 (Thatcher, 1993b).

References


———. 1990. “Scholarly Monographs May Be the Ultimate Victims


