

**ESTABLISHING THE ACADEMIC INFRASTRUCTURE FOR SCHOLARLY  
COMMUNICATION IN THE HUMANITIES IN A DIGITAL WORLD**  
**A White Paper for the UNC-Chapel Hill Scholarly Communications Convocation**  
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by  
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### **Introduction**

The objectives of scholarly books and journals in the humanities are 1) to facilitate the exchange of research, 2) to give credit to the researcher, and 3) to establish an historical, archival record of achievements that is under the control of fellow members of a profession. In turn, this record is used in awarding tenure and promotion to faculty at institutions of higher learning. Technology wonderfully achieves the first stated objective by facilitating research and communication between researchers, and by providing links to related primary and secondary sources, reference tools, illustrations, images, and discussion lists. However, it fulfills the second and third objectives of peer-reviewed publications only partially, and basic questions relating to cost, the use of open standards, the searchability of databases, and the longevity of electronic archives remain to be answered.

The current faculty view of electronic publishing was the subject of a recent poll in Canadian universities. It concluded that although many scholars are now active users of electronic resources; most of them are “much less likely to try to publish their own scholarship electronically”.<sup>1</sup> The reasons, which can be applied to universities in this country as well, seem to be based on a mistrust of the stability of the medium that makes faculty question why credit should be given for electronic materials that may disappear from the archival record.<sup>2</sup> A less obvious reason is that faculty exist in hierarchies of power, status, and prestige that are based on print, and, like any community that arranges itself in a hierarchy, it is conservative and slow to change.

This white paper argues for the full integration of electronic resources into academic culture and its reward system but also assesses the risks currently present for faculty at various ranks. I begin by discussing the crisis in scholarly communication in the humanities and continue by using the experience of Spanish to illustrate some of the problems with tenure and promotion that are likely to arise when fields or formats deviate from the norms of academic culture. I then expand the discussion to suggest ways that we might develop the institutional and scholarly infrastructure for electronic materials and thereby ensure the participation of faculty at all levels, with the full expectation of professional reward.

### **I. The Crisis in Scholarly Communication**

In 2002 members of the Modern Language Association [MLA] received a letter from their president, Stephen Greenblatt, describing “a serious problem in the publishing of scholarly books.” In particular he noted that “most departments of language and literature have come to demand that junior faculty members produce, as a condition for being seriously considered for promotion to tenure, a full-length scholarly book published by a reputable press” at the same time “that university presses, which in the

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<sup>1</sup> Keith Archer, *Opinion Poll on Electronic Publishing in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, HSSFC Report, (<http://www.ourfutureourpast.ca/e-pub/poll/poll.htm>). The problem is also discussed in Mary Summerfield, Carol Mandel, and Paul Kantor. *The Potential of Online Books in the Scholarly World*. Online Books Project. Columbia U. Dec. 1999. 1 Aug. 2002 <<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/libraries/digital/texts/about.html>>.

<sup>2</sup> In terms of academic culture, we also have to deal with problems of peer review; a latent hostility to technology among some humanities scholars; a deficient infrastructure to determine and publicize the quality of materials published electronically; and a lack of professional guidelines for publications that appear exclusively in electronic formats—although responses in all these categories continue to evolve.

past brought out the vast majority of scholarly books, are cutting back on the publication of works in some areas of language and literature.”<sup>3</sup>

Greenblatt’s assessment was strengthened by an MLA report on “The Future of Scholarly Publishing”<sup>4</sup> prepared by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of Scholarly Publishing that had been charged to “investigate and understand the widely perceived crisis in scholarly publishing and make recommendations to address the situation.” That report underscored the decreasing number of university press titles being published in language and literature. My own calculations for the number of books published by university presses in language and literature fields during the last five years reveal an overall decrease of 10%, with much more significant declines for the modern foreign languages:

**YBP New Title Reports for Books in Classics, Slavic, Romance, English,  
American, and Germanic Literatures Published by University Presses, 1999-2004<sup>5</sup>**

LC Class	SUBJECT FIELD	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	Gain/Loss	% Difference
PA	CLASSICAL LITERATURES	84	97	95	111	100	16	19%
PG	SLAVIC LITERATURES	57	40	36	32	30	-27	-44%
PQ	ROMANCE LITERATURES	187	193	151	155	142	-45	-24%
PR	ENGLISH LITERATURE	516	505	448	515	450	-66	-13%
PS	AMERICAN LITERATURE	631	637	650	698	621	-10	-2%
PT	GERMANIC LITERATURES	48	50	37	34	23	-25	-52%
	<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1523</b>	<b>1,522</b>	<b>1,417</b>	<b>1,545</b>	<b>1366</b>	<b>-157</b>	<b>-10%</b>

These figures do not tell the entire story for Romance Languages, because the four languages included in the category are not proportionately represented. Of the 142 books published in that aggregated field, the proportions were as follows:

**YBP New Title Reports for Books in Romance Languages  
Published by University Presses, 2003-2004**

**YBP NORTH AMERICAN UNIVERSITY  
PRESSES**

DESCRIPTION	LC CLASS	APPROVAL ALL TITLES	% OF TOTAL PQ
French	PQ1-PQ4000	68	48%
Italian	PQ4001-PQ6000	23	16%
Spanish	PQ6001-PQ8999	47	33%
Portuguese	PQ9000-PQ9999	4	3%
<b>Total PQ</b>		<b>142</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.mla.org/scholarly\\_pub](http://www.mla.org/scholarly_pub)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.mla.org/resources/documents/issues\\_scholarly\\_pub/repview\\_future\\_pub](http://www.mla.org/resources/documents/issues_scholarly_pub/repview_future_pub)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ybp.com/ybp/DomIndex.html?home.html>. Information about university presses was assembled from the YBP website and can be found by following "Services/Approval Plans/Title Output Reports." It is listed under "New Title Reports" for "YBP Domestic," "LC Subjects: University Presses" for each fiscal year. Information about the PQ class was provided by Ann-Marie Breaux at YPB in an email dated January 5, 2005.

## II. Problems related to tenure and promotion

Although Spanish accounts for close to 55% of all foreign language registrations in this country<sup>6</sup> and, presumably, a comparable proportion of foreign-language faculty, only one third of publications in Romance Languages are related to Spanish language and literature. Furthermore, a significant number of our faculty do not write in English, and university presses publish fewer than a dozen books in Spanish each year. University presses are therefore not likely to publish most of the books written by faculty in Spanish in this country. Consequently, faculty in our field must publish elsewhere, and they usually choose reputable publishers in Spain or Latin America. This option is attractive for our field, because it strengthens our faculty's reputation internationally. But it causes them many problems outside the department when they come up for tenure, promotion, post-tenure review, and other types of evaluation.<sup>7</sup> Especially during the past few years, the record shows that faculty in Spanish at UNC who publish with university presses are promoted regardless of the weaknesses in their vitas, while faculty who publish elsewhere, particularly abroad, are often in danger of not being promoted, despite the strengths of their vitas. The situation is even more difficult for faculty who write in Spanish. We have seen their work treated dismissively by faculty outside Spanish, even when they are considered to be outstanding scholars with stellar international reputations by their professional peers. The case of Spanish is particularly interesting for our discussion, because the problems its faculty encounter regarding tenure and promotion and other forms of academic evaluation anticipate and are analogous to some of the challenges all faculty will face if they follow the proposals being advanced to solve the crisis in scholarly communication in the humanities, particularly the recommendation that they publish books and articles in institutional repositories.

Based on the experience of Spanish faculty, I strongly recommend that we abandon any immediate, revolutionary attempts to get tenure reviewers to accept publications in institutional repositories, one of the questions we were asked to address. Faculty will resist all attempts to force them to publish in such venues, and the few who do so anyway will run the risk of being punished by their fellow faculty for violating accepted scholarly norms in the humanities for format and peer evaluation. Therefore, humanities faculty will not support that option for the foreseeable future. But there are many evolutionary short, medium, and long-term solutions that can encourage humanists to take advantage of the new technologies and lead them to increasingly greater levels of participation over time. These suggestions include the creation of an institutional infrastructure for electronic publications, the identification of similarities between print and electronic counterparts that make the electronic versions easier to evaluate within the academic culture, the establishment of guidelines by professional organizations in the humanities for evaluating electronic resources for tenure and promotion where none

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<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth B. Welles, "Foreign language enrollments in United States Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 2002" *ADFL Bulletin*, Vol. 35, Nos. 2-3 (Winter-Spring 2004), 7-24; <http://www.adfl.org/resources/enrollments.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> "Scholars looking outside the American university press system may find themselves caught in a double bind, however. Publication abroad may fail to receive due credit from committees on promotion and tenure, as the editorial criteria and evaluation methods used by foreign presses differ from those in place in the United States. Universities have tended to rely on the procedures of American university presses to set the standard and have therefore not established appropriate policies by which these publications are judged. The evaluation of manuscripts carried out in European and Latin American presses usually relies on specialists employed by the press itself; this evaluation informs editorial decisions but does not produce public referee reports such as those used in the American peer-review system. As a result, serious scholarship published in reputable presses abroad can be, and sometimes has been, undervalued by committees on promotion and tenure. These committees have failed to acknowledge the special difficulties facing scholars who attempt to publish on the domestic market; they have also failed to evaluate appropriately publication in venues that differ from American university presses." "Future of Scholarly Publishing."

exist, and recommendations about the appropriate stages during faculty careers when such activities might be appropriate.

### **III. Immediate solutions: Create the institutional infrastructure that includes a publications office to help with the logistics of the migration from print to electronic formats and an institutional repository to house campus journals, courseware, and web sites**

- **Migrate journals published at UNC in print to electronic format:** Most electronic journals began as print journals published by university presses, major trade publishers, or scholarly organizations and include scholars in the discipline serving as editors and members of editorial boards in order to guarantee that professional standards regarding the peer review of articles are met prior to publication. The publisher facilitates these steps, then prints, markets, and distributes the journals to libraries, which purchase them, provide free public access to their contents, and archive them permanently. Because they also have print counterparts, their migration to electronic format has been relatively painless, and they are becoming, or will soon become, the format of choice in most fields. However, very few print journals in foreign languages or about foreign literatures have electronic counterparts, and none of the serials published in our department does. I propose the migration of all of the foreign-language serials (and all other serials) published on our campus that are not yet available electronically from print to electronic format. Such an action would require the establishment of a publications office staffed by individuals with the professional knowledge to use national standards and best practice in setting up the electronic version of these titles and an institutional repository to house and archive them over the long term. It would also require financial support. Senior faculty could spearhead this process of migration, and all faculty could publish in these journals and expect to be rewarded for their efforts.
- **Support the creation of instructional materials in electronic format and house them centrally in an institutional repository:** The creation of course-related materials represents an ideal way for humanities faculty to become involved in creating electronic resources. Humanities faculty need campus technical support for these projects and an institutional repository to house these materials centrally. Because there is very little difference in the time it takes to prepare materials for distribution in paper or on the web, new assistant professors—and faculty at all ranks--can take full advantage of the enriched capabilities of the web for these materials. Given their facility with the new technology, many assistant professors are already using this option for their classes. And because the academic culture already includes the evaluation of instructional materials, faculty can consider these efforts as comparable to any course-related work—and be rewarded for them accordingly.
- **House instructional and research materials and notes in an institutional repository:** In the past faculty gave their manuscripts and notes to University Archives when they retired. An institutional repository would enable them to place these materials in a central location as they are created, and the University would provide faculty with a new and welcome service. While humanities faculty would not receive any academic rewards for their participation, it would increase their understanding of institutional repositories and their comfort levels in using the technology.

### **IV. Medium-term solutions build on the institutional infrastructure but require the creation of scholarly and institutional guidelines for evaluating the work:**

- **Encourage the Creation of Author, Genre, Period, or Topic Web Sites:** Some humanities faculty have developed important web sites devoted to an individual author, work, genre, period, or

literary topic that satisfy the MLA's *Minimal Guidelines for Authors of Web Pages*<sup>8</sup> and could be located in institutional repositories. Many of them include bibliographies, contextual, and critical material, and images and therefore enhance both instruction and research in significant ways. Because these web sites do not have a direct print counterpart, they do not have an existing niche in the scholarly infrastructure. It is difficult for faculty to assess them, and the profession is only now beginning to develop appropriate standards for creating or evaluating them.<sup>9</sup> So far, they are considered to be self-published works that exist outside of the reward system of academic culture. Nonetheless, given their importance, usefulness, and increasing numbers, we would do well to establish more elaborate evaluative guidelines for them and develop mechanisms of peer review to assess them in addition to the reviews that appear in scholarly journals. Meanwhile, I would advise junior faculty to think carefully about spending time on such projects. At many institutions they will not count for tenure, and time spent on them will be time not available for projects that have a better chance of being rewarded. However, senior faculty could consider such web sites to be part of their service component, or, depending on the web site, we should, as a profession, advocate for their acceptance as a form of scholarship or publication similar to anthologies or collections of essays. In any case, faculty should explore the opportunities these web sites provide to make scholarly information of a very high quality available not only to scholars and students, but also to the public.

- **Migrate Primary and Secondary Source Materials to Electronic Format:** Although Google plans to digitize the collections in the libraries at Stanford and The University of Michigan, much more remains to be done, particularly in foreign languages, and faculty should not be daunted by the difficulties, because the benefits for humanists are so great. Major digitization projects in languages other than English are unlikely to be commercially viable in this country. Therefore, if these materials are to be digitized at all, it will be because faculty in the disciplines have been willing to play a major role, with the full support of their universities through institutional repositories and other e-publishing infrastructure. The creation of full-text databases requires visionary leadership; the ability to manage complex initiatives involving many individuals in numerous departments and institutions; and the talent to raise funds to support them. In terms of scholarly infrastructure, most of these projects go through an evaluation by peers when faculty submit grant applications to a major government agency like the National Endowment for the Humanities or a private foundation. Nevertheless, at present they are counted only as a grant or a service component of a vita, or are considered to be self-published works. They do not count as a publication, even though they might be analogous to an anthology of printed texts or editorial responsibility for a series or set. Therefore, spearheading such projects carries serious risks for junior faculty, and their participation should be limited to serving in a less demanding capacity on the project. This apprenticeship will provide them with useful information that will enable them to lead such projects later in their careers. We also need to develop guidelines for creating and evaluating such projects, so that those associated with them can be rewarded in more tangible ways.

## V. Long-term solutions not only build on the institutional infrastructure and require the creation

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<sup>8</sup> *Minimal Guidelines for Authors of Web Pages* ([http://www.mla.org/resources/documents/rep\\_it](http://www.mla.org/resources/documents/rep_it)). These guidelines include information about the responsible parties, copyright, privacy, security, and site information that lists purpose, site-information tags, site configuration, citations and permissions, software considerations, updates and revisions, and archives.

<sup>9</sup> Minimal advice is available in the MLA's *Guidelines for Evaluating Work with Digital Media in the Modern Languages* ([http://www.mla.org/resources/documents/rep\\_it/guidelines\\_evaluation\\_digital](http://www.mla.org/resources/documents/rep_it/guidelines_evaluation_digital)), "which deal with the hiring, reappointment, tenure, and promotion processes, are designed to help departments and faculty members implement effective evaluation procedures"

**of scholarly and institutional guidelines for evaluating the work but involve a high degree of experimentation:**

- **Encourage the Creation of Electronic Editions of Literary Texts in all Languages:** The preparation of electronic scholarly editions is one of the most exciting prospects the new technology provides, with unlimited possibilities for including variants and hypertext links in the text, and they could be located in institutional repositories. However, scholarly editions are always controversial; and electronic editions, even more so. Although it may appear that we know how to review these texts because their evaluation is essentially the same as for a printed text, that is not really the case. The Committee on Scholarly Editions [CSE] of the MLA has prepared *Guidelines for Editors of Scholarly Editions* that includes a section on electronic editions.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, the CSE appears not have given its imprimatur to any electronic editions of any author.<sup>11</sup> Most electronic scholarly editions of literary texts therefore employ individual solutions to the problems the editor identifies, which makes them essentially self-published works and complicates their successful incorporation into the scholarly infrastructure of the profession.<sup>12</sup> Because of the highly experimental nature of web editions, the many problems associated with creating them, and the lack of models, junior faculty should consider carefully whether they want to undertake them. On the other hand, tenured faculty would do a great service to their colleagues and the profession by experimenting with electronic scholarly editions, so that eventually they can form a viable part of dossiers for tenure and promotion.
- **Facilitate the Creation of New Electronic Journals:** New electronic journals without print counterparts are able to take full advantage of emerging technologies. However, there are great professional risks associated with starting a new electronic journal or publishing in one. The editors of a new journal have to assess the need for the publication, identify colleagues with similar interests to serve on the editorial board, and develop an editorial policy. Unless they have access to an e-publications office and institutional repository, they also need to find a publisher who understands electronic publication or learn about it themselves. Given the tremendous time involved in setting up such a project; the need to find funds to support it; and the likelihood that no reward will await the editor; the creation of electronic journals is best left to senior humanities faculty who have little to lose and can afford to spend their time in this way. For faculty who publish in them they have all of the liabilities associated with any new publication regardless of format, coupled with the additional complications associated with technology. They are unknown, because many of them have not yet been included in the abstracting and indexing tools for the profession, and they may or may not require that articles be reviewed by peers in the field prior to publication. In addition, there are no widely accepted standards for archiving electronic journals or other digitized materials at this time. Therefore, the permanence and accessibility of new electronic journals is not known.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the editors of web journals surveyed in the Canadian study that I mentioned earlier believe that leaving their material on their web sites is archiving. None of these editors sees archiving as a priority problem that needs to be solved.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Guidelines for Editors of Scholarly Editions* ([http://www.mla.org/resources/documents/rep\\_scholarly/cse\\_guidelines](http://www.mla.org/resources/documents/rep_scholarly/cse_guidelines)). They include a section on electronic editions as part "V. Electronic Editions" in section "1.2.3. [Medium \(or Media\) in Which the Edition Will Be Published](#)". It addresses matters of documentation, copyright, standards and formats, archiving, resolution, etc.

<sup>11</sup> *CSE Approved Editions* ([http://www.mla.org/resources/documents/rep\\_scholarly/cse\\_editions](http://www.mla.org/resources/documents/rep_scholarly/cse_editions)).

<sup>12</sup> The search for standards is a common thread that unites us all. See the *Text Encoding Initiative (TEI)*, (<http://www.tei-c.org/>) and its *Guidelines for Electronic Text Encoding and Interchange (TEI P4)*, (<http://www.tei-c.org/Guidelines2/index.html>), and the *World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)*, (<http://www.w3c.org/Consortium/Points/>) and its working draft (<http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml2/>).

<sup>13</sup> In addition, many libraries are reluctant to subscribe to these electronic journals, even when they are free, because they do not know how long they will be around or what arrangements have been made for archiving the electronic file. If there is a cost for the subscription, it may be some time before institutions have the resources to add them to their collections.

<sup>14</sup> *Electronic Publishing in the Humanities and Social Sciences: A Report to the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada on Survey findings* (<http://www.ourfutureourpast.ca/e-pub/case/case.htm>).

Consequently, any involvement with new electronic journals without print counterparts is a fairly high-risk endeavor. Because they do not meet the criteria for the existing print scholarly infrastructure, and new guidelines that would enable them to meet national standards have not yet been developed and implemented, articles published in them may not be rewarded.

- **Experiment with Hypertext Publications:** Electronic books and journals are moving beyond the linear world of print and becoming hypertexts that link to related materials wherever they exist.<sup>15</sup> The ACLS *History E-Book Project (HEB)* funded by the Mellon Foundation<sup>16</sup> and the *Stoa*<sup>17</sup> site in Classics both share this goal. Institutional repositories and campus e-publishing offices can play a role in the development of hypertext publications. However, these projects are enormously expensive. Funding agencies like the *National Endowment for the Humanities* and the *Institute for Museums and Library Services* like to have senior faculty in leadership positions for major projects as a measure of their acceptability to the profession, but their exploratory nature makes them risky for junior faculty. Only the most intrepid individuals or those with substantial-enough *vitas* can afford to experiment in this way and hope to receive any reward for their efforts.

### **Conclusion: The Path to the Future**

Given limited time and funding, we will not be able to transfer all of the materials we need or want to use from manuscript or print to electronic format, nor will we be able to create all of the electronic reference tools, journals, and secondary publications that are becoming technologically feasible. We therefore need to engage humanities faculty at every level and in many disciplines in discussing these matters in order to set realistic priorities for the transition to the electronic universe. We must plan more deliberately with colleagues in libraries, publishing houses, funding agencies, and universities to this end. We need to involve our professional organizations in sponsoring or creating organisms that: 1) nurture and publicize projects; 2) compile lists of desired, current, and completed projects; 3) help identify the resources and funding models for new projects to follow; and 4) create criteria for the evaluation of electronic projects and materials that are discipline-based. Of most immediate concern, these groups should also 5) lobby for the inclusion of more humanities journals in archiving schemes such as *JSTOR* and for the digitization of major out-of-print books in foreign languages. Finally, we also need to reward our colleagues who are engaged in these momentous projects by implementing successfully the *MLA Guidelines for Evaluating Work with Digital Media*, which conclude by saying: “The principle underlying these guidelines is that when institutions seek work with digital media and faculty members express interest in it, the institution must give full regard to this work when faculty members are hired or considered for reappointment, tenure, and promotion.” I helped write this statement and support it fully. We must come together to expand the scholarly infrastructure and academic culture to include projects such as those I have described, so eventually we can advise humanities faculty at all ranks to participate in the exciting initiatives associated with electronic publishing with every expectation of appropriate reward and without risk to their future careers.

<sup>15</sup> For the future of the electronic publication see the MLA report titled *The Future of Scholarly Publishing* (<http://www.mla.org/resources/documents/>).

<sup>16</sup> *History E-Book Project* (<http://www.historyebook.org/intro.html>). This ACLS project has eight major goals: “1) Encourage historians to plan and write e-books. 2) Encourage scholarly presses to experiment with, to consider the issues involved in, and to develop in-house expertise for, electronic publishing. 3) Streamline production and reduce costs. 4) Develop infrastructure for archiving scholarly texts for the long term. 5) Work with others to ensure that the commercialization of intellectual materials does not hinder the exercise of scholarly communication and fair use. 6) Work closely with scholarly journals and learned societies to ensure that history e-books are properly reviewed and promoted. 7) Encourage libraries to purchase and make widely available historical works of high quality within their emerging e-collections. 8) Actively encourage the acceptance of e-books within the historical profession for the purposes of hiring, tenure, promotion, and related professional concerns”.

<sup>17</sup> *The Stoa: A Consortium for Electronic Publication in the Humanities* (<http://www.stoa.org/>).