

Opportunities of a Skeleton Crew

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How does The University of Akron Press collaborate with University Libraries at The University of Akron?

We help the library in a wide range of ways. Some context will help. The University of Akron is a regional public university in a midwestern state challenged by declining population numbers and intense financial pressures. The university has been downsizing over the last five to seven years, and as student numbers fall, we shed faculty and staff through attrition. After years of this, many units have what they experience as a skeleton crew. Where there were four, now there are two; where there were seven, now there are three; and so on. We hear the same story over and over. I find that it is a great help if those of us still on board keep this in mind when we reach out to each other with requests for help or collaboration.

So how does the university press help the library at Akron? First, I serve as a generic useful body. I attend at least two or three meetings a month with library leadership. I help the library with its strategic planning, and I contribute as I can with insights gathered from my unusual work on campus as press director, as a faculty member in the English department, and as a faculty senate officer.

I help the library help the rest of campus. The library was poised to hire a scholarly communications librarian years ago, but of course this hire was not authorized in this environment. We have no office of digital publishing and so as the press director, I am the lead administrator for the institutional repository. Fortunately our librarians share my sense that there's no point in doing a lot of work to gather faculty research that is already available elsewhere, just to stuff it into the IR. So my focus has been on using the IR to recruit and incubate new faculty and student publications. We also find new ways to leverage the capabilities of the IR to solve problems that have been created, in part, by understaffing in other areas. For example, all the Honors theses are dropped into the IR, where they can be administrated by a single person in the Honors College. The Press used a companion product to our Digital Commons to collect and make publicly available the CVs of all faculty who teach for us. This was a new accreditation requirement; half the faculty uploaded their own CV, as directed, to this self-service faculty profile platform. I and student assistants at the press gathered the missing CVs through deans and uploaded the rest.

As press director I have attended open educational resource and affordable textbook summits in the state, and I have contributed our view of publishing to the library's affordable textbook initiatives. The press also helps UA faculty

to make their own open educational resources, which we then host in the IR.

We have made the IR the new, very good home for the faculty senate minutes, which should be full-text searchable and easily discovered. All materials the university should archive for accreditation purposes could find a good home in the IR; I expect other types of documents to be stored there soon. We are also working out a plan use the IR's digital journals platform to crowdsource content for the university's upcoming sesquicentennial celebration. This will save a lot of trouble for the university's extremely small IT team.

The press also helps the library achieve its community outreach goals. The press and university archives are the two strongest links that that the library has to the community. To help recover costs, the press is partnering with the local historical society on a series of business histories to celebrate the city's bicentennial. While we will not put our name on these publications, we do this with the blessing of our editorial board as these partnerships bring in revenue, help the community, occasion great community events to which we are invited as special guests, and employ students. A local bank paid us to design and publish their corporate history, for example, which one of our graduate student interns was paid very handsomely to research and write over his summer after graduation.

So that's the general story. At a University now characterized by reduced staffing levels, there are a

lot of opportunities for units to help one another.
This might seem counterintuitive but it is the case.
The press offers fundamental skills and unique
capabilities to campus, and by going to meetings
and listening to needs we have been able to help out
in a number of ways.