

**SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING**  
**NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES**  
**IN LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES**



**LEVER  
PRESS**

**Open Access Scholarship from a Liberal Arts Perspective**

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The College of Wooster

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Scholarly communication—the flow of ideas between scholars, and from scholars to students and a broader public, through a process of rigorous review, publication, and dissemination—is critical to the flourishing of higher education. In recent years, it has also become a considerably more complex economic challenge to the institutions that depend on systems ensuring the effective and efficient flow of these ideas. Seeking to offer a constructive solution to the intensifying challenges in the system of scholarly communications, particularly as it affects liberal arts colleges, a number of libraries among the top-ranked liberal arts colleges across the United States—centered on the Oberlin Group consortium of libraries—has taken the initiative of launching Lever Press, a new scholarly press.

Principal among the challenges Lever Press seeks to address are:

- Rapidly increasing costs for both journal and monograph materials, at a rate far outstripping the growth of library acquisition budgets;
- Additional costs for the variety of subsequent uses for these materials;
- Failure of a print-centric system of scholarly publishing to support emerging digital modes of scholarly inquiry and communication;
- Questionable utility of the materials produced by the university press sector within the research and teaching missions of liberal arts colleges.

Lever’s supporting libraries have committed to funding a five-year pilot to create a scholarly press that will be **open access, digitally native, and aligned with the mission and ethos of liberal arts colleges.**

Lever Press, the outcome of this initiative, is a publishing partnership between the Amherst College Press and Michigan Publishing at the University of Michigan Libraries, joined by a governance structure separate from the Oberlin Group and representing what are now some forty-five libraries serving fifty-three institutions. In a clear differentiation from the increasing number of open access initiatives, Lever Press gives its sponsoring institutions a direct role in both the management of the press and in the development and implementation of its editorial program.

In moving forward toward establishing an editorial program, Lever Press has surveyed faculty members and senior officers across a broad spectrum of liberal arts

colleges, and Lever Press leaders visited a number of campuses to offer presentations regarding the press and receive suggestions. Finally, as a capstone to its preparatory phase, and with generous support from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, Lever Press leaders—with administrative and substantive support from the Five College Consortium, Inc.—convened a gathering of presidents, provosts, librarians, and senior faculty members from participating institutions to present its work to date, hear their views, and engage their support.

We find a variety of needs expressed by our participating institutions, reflecting the spectrum of their missions and “niches” within the relatively small sector of residential liberal arts colleges. In addition, a great many suggestions have been forwarded as to the kinds of works Lever Press might usefully produce to both reflect the commitments and scholarship valued by these institutions and to serve the needs of their faculty members and students.

Armed with the insight and vision gleaned from this research, we have shaped a series of questions guiding the development of an editorial program that will contribute constructively to the rapidly evolving field of scholarly publishing. These questions are:

- Are there **unique and unmet publishing needs** for these institutions that could, in turn, constitute the set of editorial priorities for Lever Press?
- What sorts of publishing projects might liberal arts college **faculty members** be eager to pursue as authors—particularly projects that the existing system of scholarly publication is not supporting?
- What sorts of products or outputs from the scholarly publishing system might **faculty members and students** in these liberal arts colleges engage with more deeply as readers, teachers, and learners?
- What steps might be taken to meet these needs, particularly through structured support and encouragement of innovative scholarship—not merely as a publishing challenge, but as a clear and substantive contribution to scholarship?

The leadership of the Lever Press initiative reports here on its progress to date and paths for further action, both by the press itself and, at a larger scale, across this influential sector of American higher education.

## I. THE CONTEXT

Scholarly publishing is an essential part of the infrastructure of ideas. It provides critical and multivalent functions for institutions across the entire spectrum of higher education. All colleges and universities depend on the work of scholarly publishers to enable scholars to communicate new findings and path-breaking ideas to colleagues within and beyond their fields; to push against the theoretical boundaries of their disciplines, without regard to market interest; to provide a means of evaluating the merit of new ideas, and of credentialing scholars along the path of advancement in the academic profession; and to provide intellectually sound and pedagogically effective materials for the use of students at all points in baccalaureate and graduate education.

Like all infrastructures, scholarly publishing is both necessary and costly. It is, in effect, a public good on which all rely, and thus one toward which all should contribute. Unlike most public goods, however, the system of payments sustaining the ecosystem of scholarly publication linking publishers, libraries, scholars, and students is tremendously inefficient, unevenly spread, and often poorly aligned with the collaborative, commons-oriented, and cross-institutional (indeed global) ethos of communication and exchange that characterizes the scholarly enterprise.

Liberal arts colleges have a particular stake in the system of scholarly publishing. A uniquely American institution in higher education, they have a near-exclusive focus on undergraduate education and are rightly regarded as setting the standard of excellence in that pursuit. What is more, their significance within academe has traditionally greatly exceeded the relatively small proportion of undergraduate students they serve. As a college librarian wrote now a generation ago, “The idea and image of the liberal arts college exercise an influence way out of proportion to its demographic.”<sup>1</sup>

And that is true for more than ideas and image; the intellectual reputation of the most selective liberal arts colleges stands among the top ranks of American institutions of higher education, regardless of sector. Notwithstanding the dominant view that faculty members in liberal arts colleges focus on teaching at the cost of original research, roughly 11 percent of the authors of scholarly monographs published by

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1. Joel Clemmer, “The Liberal Arts College Library Director and the Collegiate Myth,” in Frank D’Andrea, Ed., *The Academic Library Director: Reflections on a Position in Transition* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 75.

university presses in any given year hold positions in these colleges—even though together they account for roughly 7 percent of all full-time faculty members.<sup>2</sup>

Despite their academic strength and productive faculty, liberal arts colleges are largely unrepresented among scholarly publishers. Of the 142 member presses of the Association of American University Presses, 139 are situated at large, Ph.D.-granting research universities, or at non-degree granting research institutions and scholarly societies. The operation and management of a scholarly press is no small undertaking, and that may account, at least in part, for this outcome; but while their faculty members produce some 11 percent of scholarly monographs, liberal arts colleges themselves account for only 2 percent of all scholarly presses.<sup>3</sup>

## II. ADDRESSING PROBLEMS IN SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING FROM A LIBERAL ARTS PERSPECTIVE

Despite their relatively small scale—indeed, perhaps because of it—liberal arts colleges, and particularly the research libraries that serve their faculty members, students, and broader communities, have a keen awareness of the difficulties presently confronting scholarly publishing. From the perspective of the college quad, these most notably include:

- The rapid rise in the cost of scholarly materials, both journal subscriptions and monograph costs, which vastly outstrip increases in library materials budgets;
- Restrictions to access of these materials, whether print or digital, chiefly the result of copyright provisions designed to secure revenue for publishers at each point of access, but hampering reuse of these materials within and beyond these institutions;
- The inherent limitations of a scholarly communication system in which printed material is the standard outcome and privileged product;
- The measurable decline of the use of scholarly materials, particularly monographs, by faculty members and students across the liberal arts college sector.

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2. See Paul N. Courant and Terri Geitgey, "Preliminary Examination of 'Free Riding' in U.S. Monograph Publication," *The Journal of Electronic Publishing* 19(1); <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/3336451.0019.101>; and [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14\\_315.50.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_315.50.asp)

3. Of the 142 members of the Association of American University Presses, only three—Amherst, Bucknell, and Wesleyan—are sponsored by institutions that would fit the Carnegie classification "Baccalaureate Colleges—Arts and Sciences."

Each of these challenges, and others as well, has been the subject of study and dispute among key players in the scholarly communications ecosystem—leading in one bitter instance to litigation in the federal courts.<sup>4</sup>

For liberal arts colleges, these challenges are forcing hard choices and giving rise to a desire to explore alternatives that might provide the essential functions of scholarly communication—the rigors of peer review as the principal means of assuring intellectual merit and originality—while recasting the economic assumptions of traditional approaches to publishing, and examining how the potential of digital technology could enable new expressions of authoritative “editions” of scholarly work.

In the face of these challenges, the Oberlin Group—a consortium of the libraries of some eighty of the top-ranked liberal-arts colleges—began a consultation to consider how a coalition of libraries from these institutions might together create such an alternative. A task force of librarians interested in lending their institutional weight toward the realization of such an alternative undertook surveys of faculty members and an assessment of emerging open-access initiatives in scholarly publishing. Ultimately, this task force issued a Request for Proposals to a number of scholarly publishers, outlining their expectations for a partnership and soliciting specific plans for shaping a business plan able to provide, constructively and sustainably, a scholarly publishing outcome better aligned with the editorial, economic, and ethical commitments of liberal arts colleges.

As a result of this process, a partnership of the Amherst College Press and Michigan Publishing, the scholarly publishing function of the University of Michigan Libraries, was selected to realize the Oberlin Groups’ vision of Lever Press—an outlet for emerging scholarship linking rigorous procedures for review and publication with digital communications and a fundamentally different approach to the economics of publishing to create results accessible to all.

Since the establishment of this partnership in early 2015, work has continued on achieving a clearer and more substantial understanding of both the economics and the editorial program of the Lever Press. An additional survey was conducted of both faculty members and senior administrators at liberal arts colleges exploring their attitudes toward open access scholarly publishing and soliciting their input on the

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4. *Cambridge University Press, et al. v. Becker, et al.* See <http://www.arl.org/focus-areas/court-cases/106-cambridge-press-v-georgia-state-university#.V3q4aZPR9E4>

prospective editorial program. A number of campus visits to engage faculty stakeholders were conducted.

Following these efforts, an initial campaign to secure commitments to the launch of Lever Press gained pledges from 45 libraries serving 53 institutions. The governance of the Press has coalesced into an Oversight Committee, a group of twelve librarians and senior administrators elected from among the participating institutions working together with the publishing team. An editorial board of eleven faculty members from across the network of participating institutions has been convened and has begun its work; the chair of the Oversight Committee will join them in their deliberations, to assure coherence between business and editorial objectives.

Throughout this work, we have come to discern three broad areas of concern common across liberal arts colleges with respect to scholarly publishing, which give rise to three primary commitments guiding the operations of Lever Press:

*Concern:* Scholarly materials are too costly, both in terms of initial access costs (purchases of monographs, subscriptions to journals, acquisition of e-books or digital content) and the costs of, and barriers to, subsequent uses of these materials.

*Commitment:* Lever Press will be a press that produces each title on an **open-access** basis. While each title will also appear, in some way, in a print form, an open-access digital edition—whether screen readable or downloadable (or both)—will provide at least the full content of print editions and, in some cases, an enriched presentation of an author’s argument and findings.

*Concern:* With the continuing primacy of print as the “gold standard,” the system of scholarly publication—not just in terms of outputs, but the welter of expectations created and supported by faculty colleagues (particularly promotion and tenure committees), institution leaders, and scholarly publishers—is failing to provide a sufficient outlet for the increasing number of scholars in the humanities, the arts, and the humanistic social sciences who are pushing the capabilities of digital tools for weaving together narrative with data and data visualization.

*Commitment:* Lever Press will be a **digitally native** press, employing an emerging digital publishing platform being built on the Hydra/Fedora architecture by Michigan Publishing—the data management architecture utilized by a number of

research libraries for digital asset management. This new platform, “Fulcrum,” will furnish Lever Press with an advanced, integrated approach to the workflow of scholarly publishing, while making possible progressively more advanced relationships between text and other forms of media.

*Concern:* The materials produced by the system of scholarly publishing, and particularly scholarly monographs, are of declining value in the academic environment of liberal arts colleges. Across many of these institutions, the utilization of these materials—measured in terms of non-reserve borrowing—has demonstrated a steady downward slope both among students and faculty.

*Commitment:* Lever Press, supported by a consortium of liberal arts college libraries, will shape an editorial program **aligned with the mission and ethos of these colleges**. As we have discussed with faculty members in many of our participating institutions how to translate this commitment into the specific content of an editorial program, we have come to the view that the work we can best do, and that will distinguish Lever Press among scholarly publishers, will be distinguished by one or more of three qualities:

- **Exhibit the deep commitment to interdisciplinarity** that is native to smaller academic communities where faculty members daily collaborate across departmental boundaries. Projects that connect perspectives across fields of inquiry—the sciences, the arts, and the humanities—often challenging to a traditional press, are of particular interest to us.
- **Engage with major social issues facing our communities**. Typically founded on strong ethical principles and religious precepts, liberal arts colleges are the location of important debates about the grand challenges that face our society which we hope to manifest in our publications. They are also often translators of the terms of these debates to the communities they call home.
- **Blur the traditional lines between “research” and “teaching,”** creating resources ideally suited for experiential learning environments. Liberal arts colleges have reinvented the pedagogy of engagement; our publications must reflect that commitment. Among other things, we will be open to projects curated by faculty members that involve undergraduates in the process of creation and that highlight their contributions.

With these commitments in view, and as a capstone to our preparatory work, we convened a “Stakeholders’ Meeting” of fifteen senior leaders among our participating institutions—presidents, provosts, and senior faculty members—to report on our work thus far. This meeting, made possible by generous support from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations and with substantial assistance from Five Colleges, Incorporated, was guided ably by Robert Weisbuch of Weisbuch Associates, former president of Drew University and of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation.

Our agenda for this meeting, which took place in Annapolis in June of 2016, focused on two objectives. The first was to test with this audience our conclusions about the themes stated above that would guide an editorial program of a Press supported by, focused on the needs of, liberal arts colleges. The second was to engage the input of these senior institutional leaders on basic questions shaping our future:

- How does the existing scholarly publishing system serve, or fail to serve, the needs of your faculty members and students?
- What would an editorial program “aligned with the mission and ethos of the liberal arts college” look like? What would it publish? How would it prioritize among the things it might do?

The sections following present a summary of our preparatory work, reflecting the content of preparations, our visits to campuses, surveys of faculty members and institution leaders, and our conversations in Annapolis. At the conclusion of this report, written after the first meeting of Lever’s Editorial Board in August of 2016, we look forward as well toward our next steps.

### **III. SHAPING THE EDITORIAL PROGRAM**

Characteristic of the style of inquiry inculcated in liberal arts colleges is a disciplined approach to shaping, articulating, and pursuing questions. While many leaders of our colleges share a sense that the scholarly publishing system is functioning poorly to serve the needs of our campuses, that by itself is not sufficient to demonstrate a need or to shape a course of action. Accordingly, from the beginning of efforts by Oberlin Group libraries to provide a constructive solution to the problems confronting scholarly publishing, our efforts have been guided by a process of first shaping, and then pursuing, a series of probative questions. These questions have informed

our journey from exploring the possibilities before us toward the objective of creating a new kind of scholarly press.

Having arrived at the point of launching a press, we worked to articulate questions that would yield the development of an editorial program distinguished by the scholarly reputation and characteristic strengths of liberal arts colleges. We list those here, followed by specific suggestions for elements of Lever's publishing output revealed by pursuing these questions with faculty members, librarians, and institution leaders.

**Are there unique and unmet scholarly publishing needs for liberal arts colleges?** We have been guided in our planning and conversations by the idea that the sector of higher education represented by the residential liberal arts college—comprising in total some 540 institutions, of which our participants represent roughly ten percent—is distinguished by a set of unifying assumptions and purposes that would lend themselves to the creation of a distinctive voice in scholarly publishing.

As a result of our visits and consultations, and with the benefit of input on these questions from participants in our Stakeholders' Meeting, we have come to see that even across this fairly small segment of institutions in American higher education—representing only 18 percent of all four-year degree-granting institutions<sup>5</sup>—there is immense variety in student populations served, publishing expectations of faculty members, and perspectives on the primary purposes of scholarly communication.

What emerges from our conversations and from the input of our Stakeholders is a picture of publishing needs focused, for some institutions, primarily on the needs of the **faculty**, and for other institutions primarily on the needs of **students**. In consequence, the answer to this question of unmet and unique needs must engage both these realms in ways that reflect an understanding of institutional values and objectives.

Our challenge moving forward will be to establish an editorial program responsive to both sets of needs, as both are characteristic, to greater or lesser degrees, of the institutions committed to financial support of our endeavor. Given limited resources and a specific target for production over our initial five-year period, it will be im-

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5. For the total number of all U.S. degree-granting institutions, see <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=84>

portant—and difficult—to strike a correct balance between original scholarship and high-quality, open access scholarly materials focused on student needs.

**What sorts of publishing projects might liberal arts college faculty members be eager to pursue as authors?** From a number of points on the compass we have heard two themes clearly. First, academic leaders at liberal arts colleges have high expectations that faculty members will publish with the most prestigious (and presumably most rigorous) presses, clearly demonstrating fulfillment of traditional expectations of scholarly merit. Second, as institutions focus with increasing intensity on providing a high-value experience for students, faculty members at these institutions confront immense pressures on their productivity, facing rising expectations for institutional engagement and escalating demands on their time.

- Particularly in institutions which understand themselves to be “research colleges”—institutions focused on undergraduate education in which faculty members are encouraged, and to some extent expected, to maintain vigorous research and publishing agendas—materials presented by faculty members advancing along steps in the academic career must be seen to have been subjected to the scrutiny and rigor of the highest editorial standards. This means more than (but of course encompasses) practices of peer review; it means as well an editorial process overseen by respected acquisitions editors who are deeply knowledgeable about the frontiers of the fields in which they publish and often function as curators of the ongoing conversation among scholars.

While searching for, selecting, and developing works characterized by the qualities noted above, Lever Press will consider works from scholars from across the spectrum of institutional affiliations (and, indeed, scholars working independently of any institution). But particularly in the case of faculty authors associated with institutions in the “research college” segment of liberal arts colleges, it is of paramount importance that Lever’s editorial work be seen not as somehow set apart from, but fully engaged with and equal to, the work of traditional university presses.

- Increasing pressures on faculty time in these institutions place a greater and greater premium on responsiveness on the part of scholarly publishing. In the humanities and the arts particularly, publishing projects often move at a seemingly glacial pace. Of course, research and scholarly reflection are time-intensive pursuits, and while advances in the technological apparatus supporting

the scholarly pursuit may enable quicker access to, or analysis of, research materials and data sources, the work of scholars will always take time.

That said, in virtually all surveys of faculty perspectives on scholarly publishing we have either conducted or consulted, the lack of support provided by publishers to authors, and the frustratingly slow speed of the publishing process, routinely appear among the chief complaints of scholars. Better, more efficient systems for moving through the necessary processes of evaluating new scholarship, assigning and receiving reviews from qualified peers, supporting alternative means of review appropriate to the specific characteristics of academic fields and the desires of authors, and moving from final version through approval by an editorial oversight body and onto design, production, and dissemination—all of these aspects of the publishing workflow can be targeted for improvements by new technologies and platforms.

- Faculty members in these colleges are much more likely to have to engage in scholarly conversation and collaboration with colleagues outside their field of specialty and even outside their disciplines. This is, in the first instance, the result of sheer size; liberal arts college departments are generally smaller, and the simple fact of proximity encourages and nourishes cross-disciplinary exploration and collaboration.

Yet the research projects emerging from these collaborations often have difficulty finding willing partners among university presses. Because they do not neatly fit in a clear path directed toward specific audiences, risk-averse and market-sensitive presses understandably hesitate to gamble on moving them through traditional editorial processes. The result is that a hallmark of the intellectual life of faculty members at liberal arts institutions has little place for expression or recognition in the system of scholarly publishing.

- A significant generational shift is taking place within the faculty ranks of many liberal arts colleges, with professors of long tenure moving into retirement to be succeeded by significantly younger scholars. This cohort of scholars has come to intellectual maturity conversant with and comfortable employing a wide variety of digital research tools, and they seek to integrate these tools more effectively into not just the conduct, but the communication, of their research.

The scholarly publishing system has been slow to adapt to these changes.

The printed artifact—the scholarly monograph—is still widely regarded as the gold standard of intellectual achievement, even in fields where digital tools for research and exploration are increasingly the norm. Responsibility for establishing standards and expectations for what constitutes “legitimate” scholarship is generally the remit of department chairs and academic deans—and few of these leaders are either inclined or incentivized to undertake the risk of departing from long-held norms. At a broader level, with many of these institutions facing straitened circumstances and uncertain prospects, a strong tendency toward risk aversion, coupled with a disappearing appetite for the failure that sometimes results from experimentation, conditions the willingness of academic departments to consider non-traditional scholarly products as part of a scholar’s portfolio of work.

- Finally, the particular emphasis in many liberal arts colleges on deep and substantial faculty-student research collaborations shapes not only the teaching approaches but the research agendas of many of these faculty members. Collectively authored works often meet with a skeptical welcome among traditional university presses; the presence of undergraduates among those authors would rule out consideration of a work for publication in virtually all cases.

The result of this set of norms is that even the very best fruits of faculty-student research collaborations—which can be very good indeed—often find no outlet other than institutional repositories or local publication. Yet a clear community of faculty peers who shape and guide these research projects is emerging across liberal arts colleges, creating the necessary conditions for the conduct of knowledgeable and rigorous peer review.

*Suggested Elements of the Editorial Program.* With these needs in view, specific ideas for elements of Lever’s future editorial program have emerged. While by no means exhaustive of the possibilities, these might include:

- **Publications on a single topic synthesizing perspectives from a variety of disciplines.** One practical way in which to reflect the interdisciplinary ethos of liberal arts colleges would be to create titles intentionally designed to knit together a variety of perspectives on a broad topic. In a fashion similar to *Dædalus*, the journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences—issues of which have frequently been republished as books—Lever Press could develop a

“big issue” series on such topics as water, migration, climate, inequality, and so forth, commissioning scholarly perspectives from the humanities, arts, sciences, and social sciences and facilitating a means by which these perspectives would come into conversation with each other through the editorial process.

- **Innovative digital scholarship.** Younger faculty members, whose scholarly careers have largely been shaped by the availability, use, and increasing sophistication of digital means of research and argumentation, have frequently requested that Lever Press provide the tools and capabilities for undertaking new ways of relating narrative to data. This can, of course, take many forms, and what it means can differ from discipline to discipline and from scholar to scholar. At the very least we know that digital scholarship poses to scholarly publishers the necessity of much earlier engagement with scholarly authors—in their roles as researchers, writers, and (increasingly) as *producers*, or managers of teams of data specialists and designers—to assure that the long-term needs of the resulting work for stability and preservation can be supported. Beyond the complexity of providing for traditional means of evaluating scholarly merit across non-traditional scholarly projects, the role of Lever Press as a digitally native publisher must be founded on clarity of the capabilities and limits of our chosen digital publishing platform, and the ability effectively to communicate to authors the kinds of innovative projects we are prepared to welcome and support.
- **Publications arising from student-faculty research collaborations.** A hallmark of many liberal arts college campuses is the centrality of research collaborations between faculty members and students in the second half of the undergraduate career. These collaborations can be found in virtually all fields of inquiry, and frequently yield findings forming the basis of subsequent faculty publications. However, particularly in the humanities, the standard of monograph-length work and a strong norm against the acknowledgment of student contributions to the fruits of research generally means that scholarly presses will not accept for publication work acknowledging their role beyond the acknowledgments page. As a scholarly publisher aligned with the ethos of colleges who exemplify excellence in teaching through substantial collaboration in original research, Lever Press could create an outlet for the very best of this research, subjecting it to the rigors of evaluative scrutiny from scholars across the academy. (It should be noted that among the first submissions through Lever’s recently opened web gateway for

proposing works are co-authored projects arising from collaborations between faculty members and students at liberal arts institutions.)

**What sorts of products or outputs from the scholarly publishing system might faculty members and students in liberal arts colleges engage with more deeply as readers, teachers, and students?** From our surveys, campus visits, and conversations we have learned that across all of the institutions supporting our initiative (and indeed across virtually the entire liberal arts college sector) significant change in the characteristics of enrolling students is shaping a new, and in some cases unprecedented, set of educational needs—and, in consequence, for the sorts of materials produced by scholarly publishing.

- Both administrators and faculty colleagues in these institutions have repeatedly pointed out to us that the demographics of students arriving at liberal arts colleges have undergone tremendous change in the past ten years, particularly as these colleges choose to devote a greater share of available resources to supporting need-based financial aid. With this change has come as well a generational shift in learning styles, with the arrival on campus of a “born digital” generation that has never known an information environment dominated by print. For this generation, information resources exist on a broad spectrum characterized by ready accessibility, deepening interrelationship, and unclear signals or warrants as to quality or scholarly integrity.

So, too, for this generation of students the transmission of information—not excluding scholarly materials—is expected to be multimodal, leveraging text, audio, video, even immersive virtual reality technologies, in order to convey ideas and present arguments. While disruptive initiatives like the Coursera, EdX, and even the Khan Academy have emerged to respond to these learning styles, scholarly publishing has been slower to adapt.

- Many institutions among liberal arts colleges—a group well represented among Lever’s inaugural members—have pursued a niche focusing on identifying promising students from relatively low socioeconomic backgrounds or groups historically underrepresented among enrolling students. Often these students are the first generation of their family to attend college; in the case of one of Lever’s participating institutions, fully 47 percent of the student body falls into this category. Some of these institutions are counted among Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); others serve areas in economically stressed

areas, or have a long history of creating educational opportunities for this contingent of the college-age cohort.

Within this segment of liberal arts colleges, and of Lever's membership, the affordability of scholarly materials for students has a claim on priority in planning an editorial program. These materials can take a variety of forms, but generally fall into one of two categories: (1) texts that directly support the pedagogical work of an introductory class, a function traditionally (and expensively) performed by textbooks; and, (2) particularly in the humanities, editions of frequently assigned texts from the canon paired with an accompanying scholarly apparatus.<sup>6</sup>

- From both faculty members and senior administrators at our participating colleges we have heard the concern that our students' deep and passionate engagement in many of the issues shaping the challenges confronting our society—race relations, sexual respect and dignity, economic inequality, tolerance of the differing and conflicting claims of religious conscience, the impact of technology on the human future—is not matched by an equal level of understanding of the demands of academic disagreement and the modes of intellectual dispute. Often, as one scholar has recently written, undergraduates grappling to engage on these questions often resort to the view that their only choice is as between moral relativism on one side and bigotry on the other.<sup>7</sup>

Faculty members working to guide both the activism and research of undergraduate students on these difficult and vexed subjects lack sufficient supporting resources that can exemplify modes of academic disagreement and scholarly engagement with the arena of social concern.

*Suggested elements of the Editorial Program.* As in the case of the publishing needs of faculty members in liberal arts colleges, this survey of the teaching and learning needs of the faculty and students of liberal arts colleges suggests specific elements of Lever's emerging editorial program. Again, while by no means exhaustive of the possibilities, these include:

- **Scholarly, multimodal materials for course.** Liberal arts colleges are rightly renowned for their excellence in, and devotion to, the mission of undergraduate education. Yet they have effectively been sidelined as either producers or evaluators of the content being offered either to provide or supplement

6. One familiar example of a mid-twentieth-century effort to publish such texts affordably was the Library of Liberal Arts, published by the now defunct Bobbs-Merrill Company.

7. Alan Jay Levinovitz, *The Limits of Religious Tolerance* (Amherst, Mass.: Amherst College Press, forthcoming 2016).

supporting materials for introductory courses across the curriculum. Increasingly, open educational resources (OER) are being developed and made available by faculty members frustrated by the expense and access limitations associated with traditional introductory textbooks. Students eager for help but unwilling or unable to pay the often significant prices demanded by traditional texts find these materials on the internet but often have no ability to assess their quality or suitability. An effort to provide a clear, rigorous, and consistent evaluation of these materials with a view to the curricular needs of liberal arts colleges would offer a significant service to all undergraduates, particularly those from groups historically unrepresented (or poorly represented) among college entrants.

- The need for **high-quality open access editions of works in the canon**. A hallmark of the curricula in most liberal-arts colleges is an engagement with texts that have assumed a kind of canonical status in the humanities. Increasingly this canon is being expanded to include works from beyond the bounds of Western culture, and to encompass as well more recent writings translating ideas of individual dignity and worth to the struggle for civil rights and the equality of all people. A review of the most frequently assigned texts in undergraduate curricula—for example, through such a resource as [opensyllabusproject.org](https://opensyllabusproject.org)—immediately shows that a great many of these texts have long been in the public domain. Accordingly, Lever could undertake a series of “Lever Editions” of these texts, akin to (but broader in cultural scope than) the old Library of Liberal Arts imprint, making available critical editions of these texts supported by a scholarly apparatus developed by a scholar commissioned for the purpose, and published on an open-access basis. It has been suggested that the digital form of these titles might additionally include other media, for example a series of short videos featuring the author of the scholarly commentary briefly introducing key concepts of the text itself.
- **“Paired Perspectives” on difficult conversations in the public square**. Recent years have seen significant growth in the emergence of conversations on college campuses centered on matters of deep social concern. These conversations often press hard against the sometimes conflicting community norms of freedom of expression and the expectations of academic argumentation proceeding from evidence to clearly structured analysis. As a publisher supported by, and linked to, the vitality of liberal arts college campuses, and the discourse that shapes their common life, Lever Press could create a series of works focused on these

contentious topics—race relations, social inequality, the vulnerability of and respect due to sexual expression, limits to the range of tolerance for claims of conscience—in which two (or more) scholars engage in contending perspectives on these and other questions and in doing so model for students how substantive disagreement consistent with the standards of academic life unfolds.

- **Scholarship arising from the treasures of special collections.** Many liberal arts colleges hold materials of tremendous cultural and scholarly significance in their special collections. Scholars frequently visit these collections to conduct research—and then must turn elsewhere to publish their findings. Lever Press, as a scholarly publisher linked organically to the libraries of these institutions, could position itself to disseminate the best scholarship emerging from investigations of these collections and, in so doing, help to amplify the research potential of liberal arts colleges and drive greater use of these unique resources.

In assessing the potential of each of these ideas, and others, as elements of Lever's editorial program, the Lever Press editorial board must do so with a view to **both** the qualities and characteristics of work expressive of the liberal-arts college ideal—embracing interdisciplinarity, engaging with questions of social import, blurring the research-teaching boundary—**and** the spectrum of needs of our supporting institutions. Because Lever is a scholarly publisher dependent on the continued commitments of participating institutions, it will be necessary at all steps along the path of our work to show exactly how we tie back our editorial choices to both the values and the needs of our supporting colleges.

#### IV. NEXT STEPS

The question we have set to chart the path before us is: **What steps might be taken to meet these needs, particularly through structured support and encouragement of innovative scholarship—not merely as a publishing challenge, but as a clear contribution to scholarship recognized by academic departments, institutional leaders, and colleagues in the field?**

Answering the needs identified above will be neither easy nor straightforward. Success will not result from one set of perfect decisions, but from an ongoing engagement with, and responsiveness to, the faculty members and senior leaders of our supporting institutions.

Lever’s governance system is itself designed with a view to this need. Its **Oversight Committee** is elected by the designated representatives—typically librarians—of its sponsoring institutions, and has a critical responsibility to keep these supporters informed and involved through transparency in its work and frequent reporting back on progress toward our shared objectives. Lever’s **Editorial Board** comprises faculty representatives from a range of disciplines and fields, and from across the spectrum of needs expressed by our sponsoring institutions. To the Editorial Board will fall principal responsibility for helping us strike the right initial balance in addressing those needs, and in defining an editorial program that is both ground-breaking and yet participates in the larger scholarly communication system of which it is part.

The first in-person gathering of the Editorial Board took place in late August of 2016. The objective of this meeting was for the Editorial Board to be brought fully into the picture of Lever’s development and the commitments guiding its work; to receive summaries of the input we have received from surveys, campus visits, proposals for monographs and series, and the Stakeholders’ Meeting described here; and to make first choices about the direction and specific content of Lever’s editorial program.

At this meeting, and continuing over a series of subsequent conference calls, the Editorial Board reviewed the summaries of surveys conducted by the Oberlin Group task force and by the Lever Press team. It considered the input received by the Amherst/Michigan publishing team in meeting with faculty members at a number of participating campuses, as well as the recommendations offered at the Stakeholders’ meeting described above. Finally, the Editorial Board’s deliberations were given specific areas of focus by a spectrum of proposed ideas for series formulated by the publishing team, and from a number of proposals for specific works received from faculty authors through Lever’s website.

In its work, the Editorial Board engaged in substantive conversation on what should distinguish both the content and the reader’s experience of books published by Lever. The Press will utilize Michigan Publishing’s emerging **Fulcrum** platform ([www.fulcrum.org](http://www.fulcrum.org)) as a means for digital publishing; this will mean Lever’s works are built on open-source software, grounded on a digital infrastructure already in use by many research libraries, and created from inception to address problems of discoverability and sustainability. From the reader’s perspective, this will mean an experience of works that can be readily identified, easily and reliably accessed, and preserved throughout the digital future.

As a first milestone in its work, the Editorial Board has now articulated an initial editorial program for Lever Press (found in the appendix). This statement, grounded on the Press's founding commitments and the spectrum of input received from institutional leaders and stakeholders, will now guide the publishing team in moving toward acquiring new scholarship for the Press to develop, produce, and advocate.

At the Stakeholders' Meeting, the additional idea emerged that in addition to the formal roles of the Oversight Committee and Editorial Board, an important role for an informal **Advisory Committee** could be identified. Such a group should provide, it was suggested, a regular means of engaging and soliciting the views of a representative group of presidents and provosts from across our network of participating institutions, with a view to enabling them to serve as more effective advocates for Lever both within their own campuses and among their peers. Additionally, it could include the perspectives and expertise of thought leaders in technology, scholarly communication, and librarianship, to guide Lever's future development and broaden its base of supporters and advocates.

Beyond this, we have identified a number of questions deserving further investigation and inquiry beyond the scope of a publishing entity, and better suited to what might emerge as a **Lever Initiative** in parallel with the ongoing, and focused, work of the Press. Such an initiative, supported (as with the press) chiefly by research libraries, would be able to sharpen and pursue such questions as:

- How can libraries participate in the shared challenge of assuring the discoverability and utilization of open access monographs?
- What is the scholarly potential of digital humanities institutes and centers, and how can both publishers and libraries better support the emergence, acceptance, dissemination, and preservation of this work?
- How can a model of consortial funding for the development and publishing of open access monographic scholarship offer a constructive alternative to emerging models of author-specific subvention? What are the advantages, and disadvantages, of these respective models?
- As Lever represents a collaborative effort spanning not only a spectrum of liberal arts colleges, but crossing institutional distinctions between small, private, undergraduate-focused college and large, public, doctoral research university, what other areas of potential collaboration might we identify and pursue?

## LEVER PRESS | OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

*Responsibilities of the Oversight Committee include:*

- Strategic planning and guidance for the overall implementation of Lever Press.
- Ensuring the ongoing financial health and long-term sustainability of Lever Press, including recruiting partner institutions and ensuring that partners fulfill their financial commitment to Lever Press.
- High-level decisions around subject areas and product lines.
- Nomination, evaluation, and selection of the Editorial Board.
- Outreach efforts on behalf of Lever Press and its titles.
- Translation of *principles* driving Lever Press (e.g., Open Access) into *policies* guiding the business model for the initiative (e.g., the use of Creative Commons licenses, education of authors on contracts).
- Suggestions for/recruitment of series editors.

Andrew Ashton *Director of the Libraries, Vassar College*

Marta Brunner *Dean of the Library, Skidmore College*

Mark Christel *Samuel R. and Marie-Louise Rosenthal Librarian of the College, Grinnell College*

Dalia Corkrum *College Librarian, Whitman College*

Terri Fishel *Library Director, Dewitt Wallace Library, Macalester College*

Bryn Geffert *Librarian of the College, Amherst College*

Neil McElroy *Dean of Libraries, Lafayette College*

Kevin Mulroy *J. McFadden Dean of the Library, The Claremont Colleges*

Mike Roy *Dean of the Library, Middlebury College (Chair)*

Peggy Seiden *College Librarian, Swarthmore College*

Marci Sortor *Provost and Dean of the College and Professor of History, St. Olaf College*

## LEVER PRESS | EDITORIAL BOARD

*Responsibilities of the Editorial Board include:*

- Overseeing the peer review process and approving/rejecting proposals for book series.
- Overseeing the peer review process and approving/rejecting individual manuscripts and proposed manuscripts, both in and out of series.
- Ensuring objectives of Lever Press are upheld with each project as pertaining to its editorial mission and to actively develop this vision.
- Articulating the value of the Liberal Arts College ethos, and ensure the imprint's alignment with this idea.
- Publicly representing Lever Press and advocating for its value and contributions as an Open Access scholarly press.

Darin Hayton *Associate Professor and Chair, Department of History, Haverford College*

Nicolle Hirschfeld *Associate Professor of Classical Studies, Trinity University*

Matthew Johnson *Assistant Professor and Chair of East Asian Studies, Grinnell College*

Rebecca Futo Kennedy *Associate Professor of Classical Studies and Director of the Denison Museum, Denison University*

Frederick Knight *Professor and Chairman of History, Morehouse College*

Karil Kucera *Associate Professor of Art History and Asian Studies, and Chair, Asian Studies, St. Olaf College*

Jason Mittell *Professor of Film and Media Culture and American Studies and Faculty Director, Digital Liberal Arts Initiative, Middlebury College*

Mary Crone Odekon *Professor and Chair Department of Physics, Skidmore College*

Aaron Simmons *Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Furman University*

Lisa Trivedi *Professor, Department of History, Hamilton College*

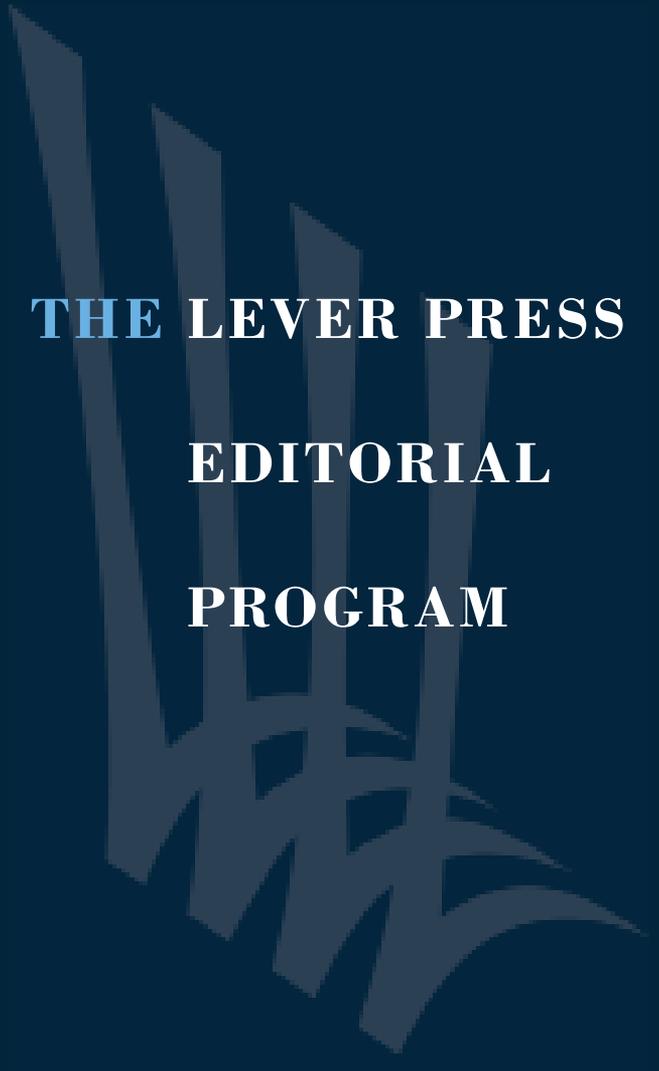
Josephine R. B. Wright *Professor of Music, The Josephine Lincoln Morris Professor of Black Studies, and Chair, Department of Africana Studies, The College of Wooster*

Mike Roy *Dean of the Library, Middlebury College, and chair of the Lever Press Oversight Committee (ex officio)*

## PARTICIPANTS IN THE STAKEHOLDERS' MEETING

Annapolis, Maryland • June 22, 2016

Neal B. Abraham	<i>Executive Director, Five Colleges, Incorporated and Five College Professor of Physics</i>
Teresa L. Amott	<i>President, Knox College</i>
Marguerite Avery	<i>Executive Editor, Amherst College Press, and Senior Acquisition Editor, Lever Press</i>
Kimberly W. Benston	<i>President, Haverford College</i>
Alison Byerly	<i>President, Lafayette College</i>
Sean M. Decatur	<i>President, Kenyon College</i>
Jeffrey Docking	<i>President, Adrian College</i>
Mark Edington	<i>Director, Amherst College Press, and Publisher, Lever Press</i>
Bryn Geffert	<i>Librarian of the College, Amherst College</i>
Philip A. Glotzbach	<i>President, Skidmore College</i>
Rebecca Futo Kennedy	<i>Associate Professor of Classical Studies and Interim Director of the Denison Museum, Denison University</i>
Frederick Knight	<i>Associate Professor and Chair, History Department, Morehouse College</i>
Marvin Krislov	<i>President, Oberlin College</i>
Abu Rizvi	<i>Provost, Lafayette College</i>
Mike Roy	<i>Dean of the Library, Middlebury College; chair, Lever Press Oversight Committee</i>
Marci Sortor	<i>Provost and Dean of the College and Professor of History, St. Olaf College</i>
Tarshia Stanley	<i>Associate Professor, Chair, Department of English, Spelman College</i>
Thomas Stephenson	<i>Provost and James H. Hammons Professor of Chemistry, Swarthmore College</i>
Lisa Trivedi	<i>Professor of History, Hamilton College</i>
Robert Weisbuch	<i>Former president of Drew University (Facilitator)</i>
R. Owen Williams	<i>President, Associated Colleges of the South</i>
Josephine R. B. Wright	<i>Professor of Music, The Josephine Lincoln Morris Professor of Black Studies, and Chair, Department of Africana Studies, The College of Wooster</i>



**THE LEVER PRESS**

**EDITORIAL**

**PROGRAM**

# THE LEVER PRESS EDITORIAL PROGRAM

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Lever Press is a publisher of pathbreaking scholarship. Supported by a consortium of liberal arts institutions focused on, and renowned for, excellence in both research and teaching, we have founded our press on three essential commitments:

- To be a digitally native press;
- To be a peer-reviewed, open access press that charges no fees to either authors or their institutions; and
- To be a press aligned with the ethos and mission of liberal arts colleges.

This last commitment means we seek out, identify, evaluate, and advocate for transformative scholarship that:

- Emerges from creative dialogue within and between traditional fields of inquiry, with an emphasis on disciplinary innovation and transformation;
- Engages with issues of social and civic importance; and
- Transcends inherited divisions between research and teaching by drawing from new models of collaborative inquiry and a willingness to address a broad audience.

Informed by the collaborative and interdisciplinary ethos of liberal arts colleges, we approach our work respecting the received traditions of scholarly publishing while being open to innovative scholarly questions and to working with researchers shaping new fields and with new approaches.

Our works will be published on **Fulcrum** (<http://fulcrum.org>), an emerging digital publishing platform built in the open source Hydra/Fedora software framework with the support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, providing a venue for research publication that treats all forms of digital objects equally and richly integrates narratives with associated data (images, videos, audio files, visualizations, etc.). This will mean that our titles are discoverable by, and accessible to, the widest possible audience, while being sustainable into the digital future. The scholarly leadership of Lever Press is exercised by an Editorial Board (<http://leverpress.org/editorial-board>) of faculty drawn from our participating institutions, in partnership with the Amherst College Press and Michigan Publishing.

We are eager to consider any proposals for projects aligned with the interests described above. We have also identified five distinct concepts we plan to pursue that, while not exclusive, describe some qualities of the work we are seeking:

## **GREAT QUESTIONS AND GRAND CHALLENGES**

Recent decades have been marked by the tension between human progress and optimism on the one hand, and increasingly complex global crises on the other hand. Creating the conditions for thriving communities in the coming decades will require transgressing traditional disciplinary boundaries and finding ways to think and work together across divergent methodologies, perspectives, contexts—even, sometimes, fundamental commitments. Accordingly, we are seeking proposals that bring such diverse perspectives to bear upon pressing issues of social, moral, political, and scientific concern. Such projects need not only be single-authored monographs. They could involve interdisciplinary groups of scholars bringing a variety of perspectives to bear on a given question; dialogues between scholars of contending, even irreconcilable, viewpoints, modeling civil discourse; or a constructive approach to a question from a discipline not ordinarily thought to be the obvious starting point. We encourage innovative thinking.

## **LEVER TEXTS**

Lever Texts will make frequently taught works available in a useful, open access format that both reflects the ethos of liberal arts colleges and challenges traditional canons. We seek texts that encourage discussion and reflection on contemporary issues and recurrent themes in human history and culture. We define “texts” broadly to include traditional written forms, new translations of foreign-language works, and media such as film, musical compositions, or still images. Each volume will build upon an authoritative version of the original text with an introduction that emphasizes its intersections with contemporary concerns, commentary or notes, an up-to-date bibliography, and suggestions for teaching the material in an immersive and experiential way appropriate to a small college classroom. All proposed texts should be in the public domain. Inquiries for translations of works likely to be under copyright restriction should be directed to the Press.

## **NEW FRONTIERS IN THE DIGITAL LIBERAL ARTS**

As a born-digital publisher, Lever Press looks to feature works of research that take advantage of online formats to offer scholarship impossible to convey adequately in print form. These works will highlight original scholarship emerging out of the Digital Liberal Arts, applying digital methods to a wide range of academic disciplines and interdisciplinary explorations. New Frontiers in the Digital Liberal Arts functions as the Lever Press laboratory for innovation, open to new models of scholarly knowledge, digital dissemination, forms of peer review, integration of data and other sources, and collaborative engagement.

## **SPECIAL COLLECTIONS**

The Helen Hartness Flanders Ballad Archive at Middlebury College and the Kuna Indian or Burmese works housed in the Denison Museum are just two of many examples of the remarkable materials held by many liberal arts colleges. Lever Press welcomes interdisciplinary studies of a specific collection and encourages thematic studies across institutional collections that promote collaboration and illustrate our connections. Of particular interest are as-yet unexplored narratives of communities, movements, and populations whose voices have been marginalized and excluded.

## **TEACHING, LEARNING, AND LEADING IN THE LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE**

Liberal arts colleges have played a distinctive, leadership role in the development of American higher education. Lever Press seeks to publish work that highlights excellence in teaching and the strategies that enable transformational student development, including through the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. We will also feature contributions from academic leadership to critically reflect upon the present and future state of liberal arts education, providing a forum for both constructive self-reflection and leadership for policy makers, administrators, trustees, graduates, and others who care about sustaining and improving upon the liberal arts college tradition.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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Open access scholarship from a liberal arts perspective

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