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Progress and Accomplishments

At the end of June, 2023, the Big Ten Open Books pilot project successfully released its first open monograph collection of 100 titles focused on Gender and Sexuality Studies. Robust promotion of the first collection and planning to develop the project into a programmatic, sustainable service of the Big Ten Academic Alliance's [BTAA] Library Initiatives has been ongoing since. Because the library and press partners, who launched this project, are deeply embedded in their institutions, the Big Ten Open Books project is uniquely positioned and committed to engaging humanities scholars in the development of future collections, as well as taking a holistic approach to open access: academy-produced open content, hosted on academy-led open access infrastructure, distributed through open channels.

The project, which ran from September, 2022 through October, 2023, aggregated 100 backlist titles from six Big Ten-affiliated university presses on the Mellon-funded Fulcrum platform. We planned for and implemented the publication of these titles (from a potential list of 107) through a process of content remediation, copyright review, and reformatting for the highest levels of digital accessibility. Through this process we also made them fully open access through the application of new Creative Commons licenses.

All of our proposed outcomes have been achieved:

- 100 books had their rights cleared for open access publication.
- The 100 texts were converted into fully accessible epub3 and PDF formats.
- The OA collection was loaded on the Fulcrum platform by June 2023 and all metadata was complete by the end of July 2023.
- The collection is currently discoverable through Fulcrum, JSTOR, Project Muse, and OAPEN/DOAB records. All content providers collect COUNTER statistics.
- All 14 BTAA member institutions and our affiliate The University of Chicago have turned on this collection in their libraries' discovery system. Not only this, but the 1600+ libraries that have DOAB turned on in their discovery systems provide full access to these works as well. The titles are also available as separate collections within OCLC, EBSCO, and Ex Libris' knowledge base systems (where libraries can select content for inclusion in their systems).

We have followed an open-open-open model. Creating open access content on open source publishing platforms, and distributing the content via open platforms. We have also implemented the open source product, Books Analytics Dashboard, which has allowed us to aggregate COUNTER usage statistics from the open hosting and distribution systems mentioned above. We are still working to extend the usage tracking functionality to the content hosted on Project Muse, and Google Books. (We did not initially plan on hosting the content on Google Books, but because of our HathiTrust relationship with them they were very willing to discuss both hosting the content and providing usage statistics for the collection).

We had other tangible successful outcomes of this project. First, the cross-institutional, Big Ten Open Books project is being implemented entirely within the academy. All other open monograph models are either a single publisher or they are driven by another entity that is not based in an institutional context (e.g., Jstor, COPIIM, deGruyter). Our methods for creating a library-university press partnership to develop a project were very successful. Each group participated fully and contributed their time and organizational resources. We saw real investment by both libraries and university presses, from the leaders to the functional specialists, in a values-aligned collaboration that allowed for shared expertise to inform our work. In both the processes and expertise required, deep collaboration is occurring between presses and libraries in areas such as copyright, discovery, accessibility, metrics, and preservation. The values we share are based on the goals of the academy that enable and foster collaboration. Lastly, the project design approach is discipline-based, community-centered, and scholar-engaged. We have been doing robust outreach (described below in the “Publications and Press” section to ensure that scholars and other interested readers are connected to the work and inform our efforts.

Setbacks and Challenges

We did not experience any significant setbacks. The challenges we faced were the challenges we predicted. The clearance of copyrights was a struggle for some institutions because it was time consuming, the funds we provided weren't sufficient for hiring an additional staff member, and didn't fall within their standard processes (i.e., copyright clearance for OA materials is different from copyright clearance for copies that are being made available for sale and many authors were difficult to reach). The challenges in this area, however, were not significant enough to cause us to alter our original timeline.

We did change course on one area of the project and that was our efforts to include the Manifold platform as one of our content delivery platforms. The costs presented by the Manifold and Cast Iron Coding teams to develop a crosswalk for the content and to create COUNTER statistic technology were prohibitive. We reallocated those BTAA-provided funds and used them to contract with the

Books Analytics Dashboard project. The primary goal of both our initial direction and our revised plan was to create a better understanding of the usage and impact of the collection. The Books Analytics Dashboard integration allows us to see all usage across the content hosting platforms.

Pilot Project Lessons Learned

The Big Ten Open Books pilot project phase surfaced several areas requiring deeper examination to fully realize the potential impact of collective action on the future of OA monograph publishing.

Many different methods were used to secure copyright permissions for creating open access editions. In some cases, the process was very effective, in others, it was time consuming and problematic. Our understanding of the variety of practices employed will inform future conversations and plans to establish standards and ease the burden of this required work.

Other areas will require deeper study including ensuring adherence to the most effective methods and highest standards for accessibility formatting, long term preservation, and engagement with discovery platforms (e.g., OCLC, Ex Libris, and EBSCO). The Books Analytics Dashboard integration provided a learning opportunity about both the wealth of information that aggregated COUNTER statistics can provide, and the limitations to understanding impact and engagement through download counts alone.

There is a huge appetite for open access materials. The authors of the works are energized by the rebirth of their materials and are enthusiastic about expanding the readership beyond the walls of academia. Creating engagement opportunities for the scholars, authors, and interested broader community members is essential, but best practices are not known. We have recently submitted a proposal to the Spencer Foundation through their Research Practice Partnership grant award program to study this space more thoroughly.

Goals Following the Pilot Project

We have secured the BTAA library deans' support to continue our university press and library partnership. They are committed to establishing a long lasting, sustainable program of open access monograph publishing. They support both our efforts to incorporate community engagement with scholars and community members and the planned expansion of active participation to all interested BTAA university presses. They agree that we should continue to focus on open access back list collections (published prior to the current calendar year) as that is a relatively unexplored realm with thousands of trusted, vetted titles waiting to be opened. And lastly, we are collectively committed to

the pure open access route we've taken for these collections: "open content, hosted on open infrastructure, distributed through open channels".

Through the development of three additional community-centered open-access collections of previously published works on DEIA-centered topics, the university press + library partnership. Big Ten Open Books, plan to:

- Implement a scaled, holistic, and sustainable business model to fund the creation of open-access collections of published scholarly ebooks from multiple presses.
- Create scholarly engagement opportunities by convening diverse groups of scholars to establish and encourage impactful interaction with open-access content.
- Create a standardized copyright review process for analyzing existing rights and converting previously published works to open-access editions.
- Articulate and implement a sustainable technology framework for creating well-preserved, and fully accessible open-access book collections.
- Establish robust metrics of usage and indicators of engagement to understand the real-world impact of university press publications. Adopt systems to communicate this information.

Evaluations

The impact and usage aggregation for Big Ten Open Books is starting to show some compelling data for making humanities scholarship available in open access editions:

- All Downloads (August 1, 2023 - January 31, 2024): 48,197
 - Book Downloads: 27,506
 - Chapter Downloads: 20,619
- Countries/Territories Reached: 185

These are remarkable especially in comparison to the usage they likely saw as print publications held primarily within academic libraries. These titles are having a personal impact. When asked "Why are you interested in this book?", responses included:

- "I've never heard of it and the chances of me finding a hard copy are slim. Also I'm gay and midwestern."
- "Interested in cultural perspectives on disability as part of my professional development in public service and also as a personal inquiry."

A follow up question was: "Is there anything else you would like to tell us or think we should know about how you found or are using the ebook? or about yourself?" Responses:

- "I really appreciate that this is available for free. I don't have much disposable income and it's important to me to know my elders and understand my community better. Queer history resources and especially literature are hard to get a hold of. Even more so when one is mobility challenged (disabled) thank you for what you do."
- "Thank you for this wonderful project and for sharing valuable and empowering queer knowledge outside the closed walls of academia, into which some of us have less access."

Publications and Press

In the summer of 2023, we shared a press release with over 160 library and publishing related organizations and influential experts. This work created a strong foundation of knowledge about the project within the academic library and press communities. We then hired two student-run advertising agencies, Backpack at University of Minnesota, and Michigan Advertising and Marketing [MAM] at the University of Michigan.

The press release resulted in several news stories including:

- Publishing Perspectives on August 14, 2023:
<https://publishingperspectives.com/2023/08/university-librarians-a-free-gender-and-sexuality-collection/>
- Information Today on August 3, 2023
<https://newsbreaks.infotoday.com/Digest/The-Big-Ten-Open-Books-Project-Publishes-Its-First-Collection-159916.asp>
- Research Information on August 1, 2023
<https://www.researchinformation.info/news/big-ten-academic-alliance-announces-ebook-launch>
- InfoDocket on August 1, 2023
<https://www.infodocket.com/2023/08/01/big-ten-academic-alliance-btaa-announces-launch-of-big-ten-open-books-project/>
 - Includes a list of announcements from the participating institutions and hosting organizations (JSTOR and Project Muse).

We have also presented on the project at the Charleston Conference (2022, & 2023), the Fiesole Conference (spring 2023), online webinars such as OASPA, Ex Libris' Content Providers, and the Big Ten Academic Alliance Library Convenings.

Additional Information

This project, like other initiatives that support scholarly monograph publishers in their open access efforts, creates both a culture of innovation within the academy, and at the same time, tremendously benefits readers everywhere. Investments in new models, and new approaches, catalyze the publishing community and provide a sustainable path toward a world where knowledge is more equitably shared regardless of an interested party's financial resources. These programs make a larger impact on access to underrepresented subjects and authors.

The university press community faces tremendous challenges to produce high quality Humanities and Social Science scholarship in a financially sustainable way. University presses are the research infrastructure relied upon for thousands of scholars across the globe. At the same time, universities are decreasing their support. Programs in the Humanities and Social Sciences are being reduced or eliminated, and library budgets for these fields have been decreasing, causing the reduced visibility of this important scholarship. The open access movement within scholarly monograph publishing offers both real financial challenges, and incredible opportunity for discovery and engagement with a broadened community. Perhaps this reach even touches future scholars who never could have imagined the discourse and creativity that these fields offer. It is through collective action, and with the funding from institutions like the Mellon Foundation, that leads the way for making such things possible. We have learned a great deal from this pilot project and are excited to continue on with this collaborative effort. We are truly grateful for your support.