

# Minutes of the Lever Press Oversight Committee Meeting

August 22, 2016

Attending: Margy Avery, Marta Brunner, Mark Christel (from his new desk at Grinnell), Dalia Corkrum, Mark Edington, Terri Fishel, Mary Francis, Bryn Geffert, Neil McElroy, Mike Roy, Peggy Seiden, Charles Watkinson, Rebecca Welzenbach

Absent: Andy Ashton, Kevin Mulroy, Loretta Parham, Marci Sortor

*NB: the structure of this agenda was a bit different than usual because the meeting took place immediately after the conclusion of the inaugural Editorial Board meeting*

## Approve draft minutes from July meeting

The committee acclaimed the minutes from the July meeting to be approved.

**Action Item:** Becky Welzenbach will post the July minutes to the Lever Press website.

## Previous Action Items to Attend to

**Conflict of Interest task force:** The committee confirmed that Margy Avery, Marta Brunner, Mark Edington, Bryn Geffert, and Loretta Parham are interested in participating in this task force, which is charged with investigating, drafting, and recommending to the Oversight Committee policies and guidelines for managing the conflicts of interest and conflict of loyalty that will arise between Lever Press and any of the institutions that we all work for, or might otherwise represent or serve.

**Action Item:** Marta Brunner will convene the task force

**Finalizing a plan for Lever Press meetings at the Oberlin Group Meeting:** Mike Roy reported that the best time for the LP Oversight Committee to meet was 12-3 p.m. on Sunday, October 9 (the day before the OG meeting starts). Dalia Corkrum reported that Dave Pilachowski can make available the use of some web conferencing software (such as WebEx) so that those who cannot attend the meeting can participate remotely. The committee discussed how best to use this time so as also to engage and report out to pledging institutions with a progress report. We don't want to conflict with the new directors' meeting. **The committee agreed that the Oversight Committee would meet from 12-2 p.m., and at 2 p.m. would be a one-hour Lever Press progress report/update. This meeting will be open to all, not just Lever Press pledging institutions.**

**Progress Report/White paper coming out of the Arthur Vining Davis Stakeholder meeting at Annapolis: next steps?** Mark Edington reported that the brief meeting summary/report has been completed by Bob Weisbuch and submitted to the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation. The more substantial white paper/progress report has been circulated in draft form to those who participated at the Annapolis meeting. It will be updated once more in light of the first Editorial Board meeting and then circulated to pledging institutions. There was a request from Terri Fishel to share the draft with the Oversight Committee in a form that can be commented on (such as a Google Doc).

**Action Item:** Mark Edington will update the progress report to reflect the outcomes of the inaugural Editorial Board meeting and share the document with the OC.

## New Business

**Proposal for a Lever Press Advisory Board:** Loretta Parham, who was tasked with bringing this proposal to the OC, was not able to be at the meeting. This item has been deferred several times, so the committee discussed again the pros and cons of this group. Even though the suggested advisory board would not be a formal part of the Lever Press governance structure, given the overhead of keeping the Oversight Committee and Editorial Board organized and engaged, we are hesitant to add another group to the mix at this time. Terri Fishel moved to table this idea for now. Mike Roy seconded and the group agreed.

**Opportunity: pilot internship program?:** Becky Welzenbach reported on some preliminary conversations with Katherine Furlong and Robert Sieczkiewicz at Susquehanna University. Susquehanna has a publishing and editing major and a mandate to find internship experiences for all students who want them--so they are eager to discuss whether students could participate in Lever Press via a summer internship. As a pilot project, this would likely entail one or two students spending one or two weeks in residence at Michigan or Amherst (or both), and then returning home to work remotely on a defined project of some kind. This program would need to be fully funded by the home institution; there is not room to fund a program like this in the Lever Press budget. If the pilot succeeded with Susquehanna, students from all pledging institutions could be invited to apply. Specific projects have yet to be defined but could include, e.g., production tasks for specific projects, researching/clearing permissions, creating captions/metadata for multimedia objects that conform to accessibility standards. The Oversight Committee liked the idea of providing additional value to pledging institutions in the form of a competitive student internship opportunity. Peg Seiden noted that Swarthmore (and perhaps other schools) have the opportunity for a January term "externship." The OC expressed concern about the bandwidth of the Lever Press staff to host/manage the students, and wanted to ensure that Lever would gain back at least as much as we put into it. Whether this goes forward at all will depend on whether Susquehanna can fund it.

**Action item:** Becky Welzenbach will continue conversations with the Susquehanna folks and provide an update in a couple of months.

## Report from Ops Group

**Update on Membership, post deadline extension:** Guilford College is in. Gustavus Adolphus expressed interest but did not follow up again. Still a little time for others to get on board!

**Action Item:** All OC members, follow up on any leads you might have with institutions who might still be interested in joining.

**Ideas for swag/marketing materials:** The OC had a brief conversation on what people find useful, desirable, attractive. We heard suggestions for: Business cards, postcards or similar attractive small print materials with key information, laptop stickers. At least one shout *against* bags.

**Action Item:** Becky Welzenbach and Mark Edington to coordinate on getting material ready and printed. Important that we have stuff to hand out at Oberlin Group (as well as for conference season in general).

## Editorial Board Meeting Debrief

Mike Roy reported on the just-completed inaugural editorial board meeting. The group met Sunday night (August 21) for dinner in Ann Arbor and met all day (August 22) at the Michigan Publishing offices. The board was very engaged and committed, with a variety of interests, expertise, and concerns/priorities. They were very focused on the challenge of arriving at a clear message that they can articulate to help recruit authors for the press. The board has strong leadership in interim chair Lisa Trivedi. Overall, the meeting was very fast. In an exercise to define major “buckets” of interest, four initially rose to the top:

1. Teaching, learning, and liberal education
2. Research-oriented scholarship (digital liberal arts; the enriched monograph)
3. Contemporary themes, debates, issues (big ideas)
4. Special collections: hidden jewels

However, the board needs to further refine these concepts in order to articulate what will make Lever Press really distinctive. We found it harder than we expected to clearly define publishing “areas” that are not driven by disciplines as traditional presses are. The board proposes to keep up momentum with a series of three one-hour phone calls in the next couple of weeks (and then to settle into a regular monthly meeting schedule). In order to focus these conversations, Mark Edington and Margy Avery will provide the editorial board with a refined draft editorial program to work through in these calls. Other points of interest: the board saw a role for student authors to be involved with the press, and did not want to silo this off as a special series or area--rather, excellent work of interest to the press in any “bucket” might have students as co-authors or contributors. In the afternoon we took a first look at 17 individual proposals and agreed that 3 were very strong, 4 were interesting but needed more information, 7 we would decline, and one 1 defer (due to a present conflict of interest). However, it’s important to note that this was simply an exercise to get a sense of the proposals: these works have not yet been peer reviewed, and the board’s first pass at these did not constitute formal acceptance of these projects. It is up to the acquisitions editor to carry these projects forward to the point that they can be put to the

board for approval. In the future, more fully developed proposals will go to the board for approval \*after\* they have been peer reviewed. Chris Butchart-Bailey at Michigan Publishing is working with Lever Press staff and Lisa Trivedi to schedule the next rounds of phone calls.

## Future Agenda Items and discussion topics

- Ongoing: updates on upcoming conference opportunities and commitments: We have made this a standing agenda item (with the exception of this meeting, which devoted more time to the Ed. Board debrief)--expect to see it again in September.
- How can Lever Press align with the missions/strategic plans of our pledging institutions (or at least help those institutions articulate this alignment?)
- What do declining UP sales (<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/08/01/amid-declining-book-sales-university-presses-search-new-ways-measure-success>) mean for Lever Press? What opportunities can we exploit? How can we do things better/differently?