The Lever Initiative: Reimagining the Scholarly Monograph

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Introduction

Archimedes is said to have claimed that given a lever and a firm place to ground it, he could move the earth. The Oberlin Group of libraries, inspired by the contributions made to open scholarship and our conceptions of academic publishing by groundbreaking projects such as *OAPEN*, *Knowledge Unlatched*, and the partnership between the libraries and press at *The University of Pittsburgh*, launched the Lever Initiative to investigate whether there was a role they could play in advancing open access publishing of scholarly monographs and short-form books. Four principles are guiding our consideration of new models:

Lever Initiative Task Force:

- Mark Christel, College of Wooster
- Barbara Fister, Gustavus Adolphus College
- Bryn Geffert, Amherst College
- Neil McElroy, Lafayette College
- Pamela Snelson, Franklin and Marshall College
- Mike Roy, Middlebury College
- Pat Tully, Wesleyan University

Consultant: Melinda Kenneway, TBI Communications

Quality: Offering superior editorial support and delivering academic texts that people want to read.

Open Access: Sharing works freely with all.

Innovation: Making full use of technology and new media.

Sustainability: Building upon a stable and distributed business model.

Project Methodologies

- Interviews of scholars, academic administrators, and publishers.
- Meetings with library deans and directors.
- Two broad surveys of academics to learn more about their publishing experiences, expectations, and hopes. Over **600 responses from Oberlin Group faculty and over 300 from faculty of other institutions**.
- Desk research, leading to publication of a white paper on open access book publishing models, available here: <http://tinyurl.com/kwfo485>.

Highlights from our survey of 600+ Oberlin Group Faculty

- **34%** say it takes 13 months or more to get their book published *after* they secure a publisher.
- **39%** are very or somewhat dissatisfied with the pricing of their books. Respondents indicated high costs limited access to their work.
- For current publishing processes, faculty were most satisfied with “production quality” (**43%** somewhat or very satisfied) and “quality of peer review” (**40%**).
- **70%** are interested in publishing a short-form book.
- **78%** would use open access books.
- **82%** would consider publishing with a new, innovative open access publisher.

Preliminary analysis of 300+ non-Oberlin Group faculty

- More interested in digital publishing
- Less satisfied with current publishing options
- Greater interest in short-form publishing
- More enthusiasm for new publishing initiatives/a new press

The Oberlin Group

We are now **transitioning to Phase Two**, when the Oberlin Group libraries will consider next steps. Potential directions include options such as establishing our own digital, open access press or collaborating with a like-minded publishing partner.