Lever Initiative: Investigating the Feasibility of Launching a New Open Access Publishing Venture for the Liberal Arts

An Oberlin Group Project

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1.0 Executive Summary

This report summarizes the work of the Oberlin Group, with the support of TBI Communications, to investigate the feasibility of launching a new, innovative Open Access Press with a focus on monograph publishing.

The project was launched in mid 2013 and christened the Lever Initiative, to reflect the ambition of a group of top-ranked liberal arts colleges in the United States to accelerate the adoption of more open and innovative approaches to publishing scholarship. The project blog is available at: http://leverinitiative.wordpress.com.

The research program comprised interviews with senior library staff and faculty staff within Oberlin Group institutions; an online survey to faculty both within and outside of Oberlin Group member organizations; a landscape review of current Open Access (OA) book publishing initiatives; and interviews with individuals associated with those initiatives, to learn from their experiences and insights.

The results of this research are summarized within this document, and more detailed reports of the findings are available for download from the Lever Initiative blog.

Attitudes of Oberlin Group library directors
Escalating costs of monographs are an increasing concern. It is felt that a disruptive model is required that will reduce costs and make better use of new technologies. The current monograph format is challenged as being too dense and specialist – more about tenure and promotion for the author than accessibility and usefulness for the reader. Faculty attitudes are cited as a potential challenge – with the current system suiting many, particularly those already established in their career. New methods are emerging for evaluating publication impact (e.g. DOI-based metrics such as book/chapter downloads, citations, social media mentions and so on), but as yet these don’t carry the prestige of a major University Press publisher. Open Access in the humanities is seen to be a particular challenge because of lower funding available than, say, within Science Technology and Medicine (STM). There are many questions as to whether the Oberlin Group is best placed to establish a new Press, or whether instead it should put its voice and influence behind other emerging initiatives.

Attitudes of Oberlin Group faculty
Generally, scholars are satisfied with the current publishing system. There isn’t evidence of a drive to publish under an Open Access model or for innovative new formats. Overall, attitudes remain relatively conservative – most likely due to the strong link between traditional monograph publishing and tenure and promotion. Authors still cite the prestige
of the publisher as the most important factor when deciding where to publish. There is some discontent with editorial quality, distribution, remuneration and price of books, but this isn’t extreme. Most faculty are satisfied with the access to books that they already have through their library and are suspicious of the quality of free online books not provided by the library. Authors rate traditional publisher services significantly higher than they do innovative new features, such as integrated multimedia. Despite this relative conservatism, when asked if scholars would support a new Open Access Press established by a group of liberal arts colleges, the vast majority agreed that they would be interested.

**Attitudes of faculty outside of the Oberlin Group**

Faculty answering our survey from outside Oberlin Group membership reflected similar attitudes. Notable differences included a higher level of interest in digital publishing, less satisfaction with current publishing services, more acceptance of OA content as being the same quality as non OA content, less satisfaction with the current monograph format, higher interest in short-form monographs, and even more stated wiliness to support a new OA Press.

**Current OA book publishing initiatives**

This report summarizes a range of existing initiatives – from traditional publishers (University Presses and commercial publisher), libraries and newly established groups and organizations. There are many experiments underway, which are particularly well developed in Europe, Canada and Australia. A variety of business models are being applied, ranging from crowd-funding through to freemium and author-pays.

**Options for Oberlin Group**

Based on the research program, four options are presented for further review by the Oberlin Group in deciding next steps:

1. Independently establish a new OA Press (as originally envisaged); further work will need to be undertaken to identify funding sources and appraise costs/benefits etc;
2. Collaborate with existing publishing ventures; there are a range of partners that Oberlin Group might work with to achieve its objectives, thereby benefiting from existing infrastructure and expertise;
3. Support “unlocking” initiatives; either through joining an existing consortium such as that associated with KnowledgeUnlatched and donating budget to make selected publications OA. Alternatively, form a library commissioning consortium whereby publishers apply for grants to publish OA books, giving Oberlin Group more editorial control;
4. Focus on advocacy rather than publishing to help remove the barriers that are slowing down uptake of existing OA options.
These options are not mutually exclusive, and a combination may be the most effective way forward.

**Recommendations**

Our research indicates there is an opportunity for the establishment of an Open Access publishing program for a new, short-format monograph, which blends use of new technologies with the traditional editorial, production and distribution support services that authors value. That program could be run in partnership with an existing publisher, a new Press could be established, or a more inventive solution could be found, such as a library publication commissioning consortium. The biggest challenge will be establishing a sustainable business model. Innovation in process and production will be required to minimize costs. Significant effort will also need to go into establishing a compelling brand for the Press/series that carries the required level of prestige.

A next step would be to more fully evaluate and cost these options. To do this, Project Lever needs a clear indication from the Oberlin Group that there is support for continuing the work to appraise the feasibility of establishing a new OA Press or publishing program. Without that backing, the Oberlin Group could still make a vital contribution towards meetings its original objectives through an assertive and well-structured program of advocacy.
2.0 Background

The current model of scholarly publishing is inherently flawed and nearly broken. Most of the scholarly narratives published today are accessible to only a fraction of the world’s population. Poorly endowed institutions in the United States and most institutions in the developing world cannot afford to purchase or otherwise obtain quality work. At the same time, much is published that should not be published.

The Oberlin Group (an organization comprised of selective, top-ranked liberal arts colleges in the United States) commissioned this study with a view to investigating the feasibility of producing ourselves good academic literature—literature that people want to read—made freely available to all; and to do so efficiently, sustainably, and making full use of technology and new media.

Such an endeavor would support our institutions’ commitments to life-long learning; it would promote research in the fields taught at liberal arts colleges; and it will inspire our alumni, thus strengthening support for our institutions themselves.

We also believe this to be an altruistic endeavour – an attempt to make scholarship available to all, without regard to affluence, location, or ability to travel. We envision over time that our work may dovetail nicely with allied work taking place in the development of Open Access textbooks. It also has the potential to become a source of scholarly literature for students enrolled in free, online classes.

We believe liberal arts college libraries can support authors and readers better than they are supported now. Our colleges can also provide a model and a test bed for nimble, innovative, sustainable, and collaborative academic publishing.

Freed from old assumptions and old technology centered around the production of print publications, we can enjoy a unique chance to rethink what constitutes a “publication.” The opportunities afforded by new media—audio, video, crowd-sourcing, mash-ups—are all opportunities this venture can easily embrace.

This study reviews the current landscape for Open Access (OA) book publishing; assesses the needs and interests of authors in new models and formats for monograph publishing in the liberal arts; and makes recommendations for how the Oberlin Group might respond to ensure that opportunities for more progressive and open approaches to publishing useful and high-quality scholarship are accelerated.
3.0 Objectives

The Lever Initiative was established with the following objectives:

1. To understand the current challenges for authors and readers in producing and accessing high quality scholarship in the liberal arts.

2. To identify the critical unmet needs of the community that may require a new approach to publishing in the liberal arts.

3. To review the opportunities that a networked, multi-media online environment offers for presenting and sharing scholarship in new ways.

4. To explore the role that liberal arts colleges could or should have in addressing these challenges and meeting these needs.

4.0 Methodology

The Oberlin Group appointed a task force of senior library staff from amongst its members to manage this project, which comprised:

- Mark Christel, Director of Libraries, College of Wooster
- Barbara Fister, Academic Librarian, Gustavus Adolphus College
- Bryn Geffert, Librarian of the College, Amherst College
- Neil McElroy, Dean of Libraries, Lafayette College
- Pamela Snelson, College Librarian, Franklin and Marshall College
- Mike Roy, Dean of Library and Information Services, Chief Information Officer and Librarian at Middlebury
- Pat Tully, University Librarian, Wesleyan University

The task force appointed an external consultancy – TBI Communications – to assist in the study, and the project was named the Lever Initiative. A lever amplifies an input force to provide greater output force. This is exactly what this project is designed to do. By focusing the energies of a collection of institutions, we are better able to bring about positive change.

The following activities formed the basis of this research study:
• A series of **virtual workshops** were held with 50 Library Directors from across the Oberlin Group membership, in which attitudes towards current publishing options were explored, together with opportunities for improvement/innovation. A summary report is available at: [http://leverinitiative.wordpress.com/2013/09/25/summary-from-virtual-workshops/](http://leverinitiative.wordpress.com/2013/09/25/summary-from-virtual-workshops/);

• **In-depth interviews** were conducted with Library Directors, Provosts, research staff within the Oberlin Group, and also external organizations who were already experimenting with OA book publishing;

• A **landscape review** of current initiatives in OA book publishing was undertaken, and a summary report is available at: [http://leverinitiative.wordpress.com/2013/12/17/oa-books-landscape-review/](http://leverinitiative.wordpress.com/2013/12/17/oa-books-landscape-review/);

• The **Lever Initiative Task Force convened** at Rollins College in November 2013 to discuss the project findings to date and explore early ideas for innovative approaches to monograph publishing;

• An **online survey** was distributed to faculty members within Oberlin Group institutions (626 responses were received) and also to faculty outside of Oberlin Group (368 responses were received). A summary of the survey findings is available at: [http://leverinitiative.wordpress.com/2014/03/13/survey-results-show-support-for-launch-of-an-innovative-new-press/](http://leverinitiative.wordpress.com/2014/03/13/survey-results-show-support-for-launch-of-an-innovative-new-press/);

This summary report draws on findings from these research activities and presents several opportunities for how the Oberlin Group might respond to meet its objectives.

A blog was established (leverinitiative.wordpress.com), which was updated with news and reports throughout the project. The Task Force met regularly throughout the project to review progress.
5.0 Research Findings

The following section summarizes research findings taken from several more detailed reports, which are separately available as indicated in section 4.0.

5.1 Attitudes of Oberlin Group library directors

In September 2014, a series of virtual workshops were held with groups of Library Directors from Oberlin Group institutions. The following themes emerged from our discussions:

**Problems**

A common concern with the current situation is the escalating costs of journals, which are taking up an ever-growing proportion of a library’s budget, reducing money available to buy books. This in turn is forcing up publisher prices for monographs, as they are able to sell less copies, so the unit price increases. There are also concerns over declining editorial standards and lack of innovation in making use of new media.

The current monograph format is challenged as being too dense and specialist – more about tenure and promotion for the author than accessibility and usefulness for the reader. Students today are more likely to access a variety of sources of information rather than reading single in-depth publications. There is also a sense that book content was declining in usage, as it’s less readily discoverable online than other material.

“We need to solve the insularity of contemporary publishing.”

Oberlin Group Library Director

**Opportunities**

New media is frequently referred to as an opportunity yet to be fully developed, with digital scholarship well positioned to help the advancement of conversations, students, researcher productivity and scholarship overall. The opportunity to consider new forms of monograph publishing was also discussed, including shorter forms to complement the traditional extended argument format.

“It’s less about publishing and more about finding new methods of exchange.”

Oberlin Group Library Director

A focus on interdisciplinary publishing is seen to be a key opportunity, and one that would be a good match for a group of Liberal Arts Colleges – presenting integrated thinking and looking at subjects from many points of view. The idea of publications as “living documents” was explored – with publishers providing tools through which work could be
presented, discussed, developed, reviewed/assessed – in a more open environment, with greater public engagement.

**Challenges**
Faculty attitudes are cited as a potential challenge – with the current system suiting many, particularly those already established in their career. The system of tenure and promotion is heavily dependent on traditional book publishing practices, with prestigious publishers – as opposed to more innovative, digital presentations of scholarship. New methods are emerging for evaluating publication impact (e.g. DOI-based metrics such as book/chapter downloads, citations, social media mentions and so on), but as yet these don’t carry the prestige of a major University Press publisher.

Open Access in the humanities is seen to be a particular challenge because of lower funding available than say within Science Technology and Medicine (STM). Paying for the costs of publication via Article Processing Charges (APCs) would be difficult for most authors and their institutions.

**Role of Oberlin Group**
The idea of launching a new Press to deal with these challenges and opportunities is seen as attractive by many, but the role of Oberlin Group libraries in this is seen as less clear. There is agreement that a new Press could potentially be the fastest and most effective way to introduce ground-breaking techniques to monograph publishing, and that Open Access is desirable for ease of access for readers.

The Oberlin Group could bring some unique qualities to a new Press – fostering interdisciplinary interaction and encouraging broad thinking; building on the special relationship between faculty and students; offering greater editorial support for authors in helping them develop their ideas; focusing on the intellectual life of students rather than the research production of faculty.

However, there is also agreement that a new Press would need to offer something fundamentally different to anything that currently exists and that the support of faculty would be essential; without a compelling need from authors, a new initiative would likely fail. Open Access in STM has gained momentum with different drivers and with higher levels of funding available to support the model – was this enough now to drive interest amongst researchers in the liberal arts to publish in more open and innovative ways? There were many questions as to whether the Oberlin Group was best placed to establish a new Press, or putting its voice and influence behind other emerging initiatives.
5.2 Attitudes of Oberlin Group faculty

Towards the end of 2013, the Lever Initiative distributed an online survey to faculty members of Oberlin Group institutions asking for their views on monograph publishing; over 600 responses were received. The full report and analysis of the survey findings is available at: http://leverinitiative.wordpress.com/2014/03/13/survey-results-show-support-for-launch-of-an-innovative-new-press/.

Through this research we set out to assess whether authors would be likely to support a new OA Press by submitting their work and to understand their key motivations in selecting publication outlets.

Publishing Experience
The majority of faculty in this sample are both actively using and publishing books and journals and see this as core to their academic life, both as researchers and educators. Having said that, current publishing practice is not without its challenges, and shortfalls. Key improvements that faculty wanted to see include shorter publication times, improved editing/quality control and communication generally throughout the publication process; wider distribution, online availability and less copyright restrictions; more author support from the institution and publisher during the writing process; financial improvements (higher royalty payments, reduced prices); better promotion and market feedback. The current full-length format of monograph is seen as either very or quite satisfactory by 80% of faculty.

- 58% hadn’t published a book in the last 5 years; 25% had published one; 11% had published two and 6% had published three or more;
- Of those that had published a book in the past 5 years, 77% said it took 13 months or longer to get published;
- Book proposals aren’t being turned down – of those that had submitted a book for publication, only 20% had had this declined;
- 60% of authors are satisfied with the current multimedia options available to them; there are generally mid-range levels of satisfaction with all key publishers’ services; the highest levels of dissatisfaction were related to pricing of books, costs of books and speed of publication;
- 24% are very interested in a short-form monograph and 45% possibly interested; 20% are very satisfied with the current monograph format and a further 59% quite satisfied.
Access to Scholarship for Teaching and Research
There are generally quite high levels of satisfaction amongst faculty with access to books through their institution, with 70% of survey respondents saying they are very or somewhat satisfied. There is some suspicion of freely available resources, with half of all respondents perceiving free online (non-journal) content as being of lower quality than books they access through their library. Despite this, there is support for OA scholarly books, with 50% of faculty in the arts and humanities saying they’d be “very likely” to use such publications. The resounding message from comments solicited was that quality is key – from peer review through to the finished product, as is the prestige of the publisher.

- 70% are very or somewhat satisfied with access to books through their library; 5% are very dissatisfied;
- 34% use books from the library on a daily or weekly basis;
- Most frequently used resources are articles (75%) and books (49%) provided by the library. Personal book purchases are also frequently referred to (70%). Free online books are frequently referred to by 21% of scholars;
- 50% think the quality of free online content (excluding journals) is lower quality compared to content provided by the library;
- 39% would be very likely to use Open Access scholarly books if a sustainable OA model could be found.

Publications and Career
One of the critical challenges to establishing a new OA Press is that the existing system of tenure and promotion is closely tied to established publishing practices with traditional format publishers. Overcoming this is likely to be the single biggest challenge to establishing a new publishing venture. When considering what counts for career progression, 90% of survey respondents ranked quality of scholarship as important with 75% citing reputation of the publisher. Almost 50% of faculty ranked the prestige of publisher as the most important consideration when choosing where to publish their work.

“It would depend on the quality of editorial oversight and peer review; I would want to recognize names of people involved in the project. And I would also want my institution to formally acknowledge that innovative publishing media would be recognized in tenure/promotion.”
Member of faculty within Oberlin Group Institution

- The main reason for publishing is to develop a scholars’ research, followed by tenure and promotion; royalty payments are seen as least important;
• Prestige of publisher is the most important factor in deciding where to publish, followed by quality of editorial support and then marketing/distribution;
• A publisher making the book freely available online is only ranked 1st, 2nd or 3rd as a reason for selecting that publisher by 18%; ability to integrate multimedia is only ranked 1st or 2nd or 3rd by 11% and innovative format/presentation by 18%
  Payment/royalty is ranked 1st, 2nd or 3rd by 18%;
• 70% say publications play a critical role in tenure and promotion, and a quite important role by 20%;
• 88% rate quality of scholarship as judged by peers/reviewers the most important feature in tenure and promotion (very or somewhat important), followed by 78% citing reputation of the publisher; citations only score 57% as most important and metrics such as downloads and social media coverage only score 9%.

**Attitudes Towards a New Publishing Venture**

Although there are faculty who were not in favor of the Oberlin Group establishing a new Press, overall there is a clear interest and a willingness from many faculty to engage with a new OA Book Press initiative with 83% expressing an interest. Many of the challenges in current book publishing outlined in the free-text responses lead us to the elements that faculty would like to see addressed by a new Press. Perhaps contrary to some expectations, many of these elements are key components of a traditional print book publishing business. Should a new Press be launched, a sensible way forward could be to develop the excellent functionality that a digital online platform enables, but also focus closely on improving the traditional publishing features that this research suggests is key.

“I would not support any new venture because it would mean cutting back on the purchase of books from academic presses.”

Member of faculty within Oberlin Group Institution

“I would absolutely consider it. The big question is whether such a press would do what it claims to do. Again, the idea that scholars were actively choosing it instead of traditional presses is important – instead of choosing it because they can’t get published in traditional formats.”

Member of faculty within Oberlin Group Institution

• 48% feel strongly positive, or positive towards using new media such as blogs and wikis to share their work; 20% are negative and would not use them;
• When asked to rank the most important features for a new publishing venture, the following score most highly (very important): high quality peer review (73%), high quality editorial support (64%), reputation of associated people/institutions (46%),
print edition available (34%). Ranked “very unimportant” were: option to continually update publication over time (17% said very unimportant), community feedback on work in progress (16% said very unimportant), and multimedia capabilities (14% said very unimportant);

• 43% would definitely consider publishing with a new innovative Open Access press; 40% said maybe and 17% said no.

5.3 Attitudes of faculty outside of the Oberlin Group

In early 2014, the Lever Initiative distributed the online survey that had been sent to faculty members within Oberlin Group institutions, to a wider group of institutions for sharing with their faculty. The motivation for broadening the research was to understand how the views of faculty within Oberlin Group institutions compared to the broader research and teaching community. 368 responses were received, which gave us some data to be able to test whether the attitudes of Oberlin Group faculty reflected wider held views. The full report and analysis of the survey findings is available at:

Publishing Experience

There is more digital publishing activity amongst this group than was found amongst faculty who were members of the Oberlin Group. Digital projects ranked higher than books published (50% vs 41%). Tenured respondents were however in line with Oberlin member respondents, with book publishing outweighing digital.

Less of the respondents who were members of the Oberlin Group had had a book declined than those outside that group (80% Oberlin Group members had not been declined v. 64% of faculty who were not members of Oberlin Group institutions).

“One publisher I have talked to only wants big names to sell books, but authors can’t become big names if they are not given the chance to get into the market.”
Faculty member, US-based institution

When ranking satisfaction with current book publishing processes, there were higher levels of satisfaction with distribution for this group than for the Oberlin Group members, for whom poor payment for work caused more consternation. Although the elements of current book publishing that respondents are most satisfied with are echoed in both groups, the levels of satisfaction are markedly lower amongst faculty outside of the Oberlin Group.
Faculty outside of the Oberlin Group are less satisfied with the current monograph format than those belonging to an Oberlin group institution (30% not satisfied compared to 20% in the first group). There are much higher levels of interest from those faculty who are not a member of an Oberlin Group institution in publishing a short-form book (those answering “very interested” is 41% here compared to 24% amongst Oberlin Group faculty).

“Having media of varying sizes is one of the advantages of modern flexibility – I could do a lot with 100 pages.”
Faculty member, US-based institution

“ Might create more readable scholarly content – as opposed to what’s found in tomes.”
Faculty member, US-based institution

Access to Scholarship for Teaching and Research
Faculty outside of the Oberlin Group are generally less satisfied than those within Oberlin Group institutions (61% vs 71%) with the access they have to books through their institution.

Faculty outside of the Oberlin Group are much more responsive to free online content than those within Oberlin Group institutions, with over half believing the quality to be the same, compared to just 25% within the Oberlin Group. As a result, perhaps, there is stronger support from faculty outside of the Oberlin Group (62% “very likely” versus 39% amongst Oberlin Group faculty) to use OA books in teaching and research. This is even higher across arts and humanities and social sciences. Comments revealed less concern from this group around the prestige conferred by traditional book publishing practice.

“Especially likely to use them in my courses! I love assigning OA scholarly books, as graduate students are strapped for cash and books are pricey.”
Faculty member, US-based institution

Publications and Career
Tenure and promotion concerns relating to publishing in new formats are slightly higher for faculty outside of the Oberlin Group but the most important motivations mirror those within Oberlin institutions.

Attitudes Towards a New Publishing Venture
There is more even enthusiasm in this group for a new press, with 59% saying they would definitely consider publishing with a new, innovative OA press compared to 43% within Oberlin Group institutions.
“I am tired of the double taxation involved in the current system: my university pays me to write up my research, then my university pays again ... for access to the work ...”
Faculty member, US-based institution

“Thanks for the initiative. We humanities scholars need to break free from this copyright dictatorship. It’s contrary to the dissemination of knowledge.”
Faculty member, US-based institution
6.0 Current OA Book Publishing Initiatives

As part of our research program, we reviewed the current OA book publishing landscape. Emerging and established initiatives were reviewed and a full summary is available at: http://leverinitiative.wordpress.com/2013/12/17/oa-books-landscape-review/.

The objectives of the review were to appraise the current state of the Open Access publishing market for monographs and books, with a focus on the humanities and social sciences. Formats, business models, key initiatives, and the activities of established publishers were explored. In-depth interviews were then conducted with half a dozen representatives from organizations already experimenting with OA book publishing.

At the date of writing this report, the Directory of Open Access Books listed 1,897 books from 61 publishers. According to the Association of American Publishers, the ebook market accounted for 23% of publisher net revenues in 2012, up from 17% in 2011 and, 1% in 2008.¹ According to a Bowker Market Research report, the number of books and ebook self-published each year in the US has increased by 287 percent since 2006.²

Unlike the consumer market, which is dominated by Amazon, the library market does not have the dominance of a single key player, the distribution of e-books to libraries has been mediated by a number of different middlemen, such as EBSCO (NetLibrary), Ebrary, myilibrary, the Ebooks Corporation, and Questia, each of whom have slightly different file preparation standards and proprietary platform requirements. Ebooks are bought under a variety of business models including: purchasing individual titles or packages, outright purchase or subscription, credit systems and rental.

In discussions with other OA publishers, most consider the finances and market complexity to be the biggest challenge for OA monograph publishing. The eBook market is highly fragmented, so for wide access and discoverability it’s necessary to make books available on lots of different platforms, with different software and file formats. This all demands different workflows and consumes resources. Author attitudes are also cited as a challenge: “they want all the advantages of publishing Open Access but they still expect you to act like a traditional publisher.”

6.1 New initiatives

Some key existing and emerging initiatives in Open Access book publishing include:

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• **OAPEN** (Open Access Publishing in European Networks) is a collaborative initiative of mostly university presses established to develop and implement a sustainable Open Access publication model for academic books in the Humanities and Social Sciences. OAPEN was funded by the European Commission between September 2008 and February 2011 and is currently operating as an independent foundation. The business model for the OAPEN organization is based upon funding from publishers and research institutions which join as partners or which place their monographs in the OAPEN Library.

• **Directory of Open Access Books (DOAB)** is a service of OAPEN Foundation. The primary aim of DOAB is to increase discoverability of Open Access books. Metadata will be harvestable in order to maximize dissemination, visibility and impact. Aggregators can integrate the records in their commercial services and libraries can integrate the directory into their online catalogues, helping scholars and students to discover the books.

• **Knowledge Unlatched** is a not-for-profit initiative that is aiming to create a sustainable route to OA for book length HSS (Humanities and Social Science) publications and make them as accessible as journal articles. They are working to do this by helping libraries around the world share the payment of a single **Title Fee** to a publisher, in return for a book being made available on a Creative Commons licence via OAPEN as a fully downloadable.

• **Library Publishing Consortium** is a library led two-year initiative exploring innovative library publishing solutions, currently working with 50 college and university libraries.

• **Open Monograph Press** initiative launched by Professor John Willinsky in 1998, has advocated for Open Access to scholarly research while also developing technological solutions that foster its adoption (especially journal publication). It now aims to use the opportunities provided by new technologies to re-model the research monograph from a paper-based product into a network-based resource. A key element in their approach lies in the use of open source software, which is freely available, not only to reduce costs but also to encourage collaboration between different publishers and institutions involved in the publishing of research monographs.

• **Open Humanities Press (OHP)** is an Open Access initiative in the Humanities launched in 2008 initially publishing Journals. In 2009 it launched an OA monograph series, all the books are freely available as full-text digital editions. In addition, they are offered as "reasonably-priced paperbacks" — on a print on demand basis. The OHP Collaborates with the **University of Michigan Library** (MPublishing) and makes use of the **Open Monograph Press** software.

• **Open Book Publishers (OBP)** is a UK-based, non-profit company specializing in Open Access book publication for full academic monographs in HSS. OBP books are all peer-
reviewed and published in hardback, paperback, pdf and ebook editions, but also include a free online edition that can be read via their website or through Google Books. About half of OBP’s revenue comes from publishing grants and authors’ contributions, and half from the sale of printed and e-book editions.

- **Open Library of Humanities** (OLH) is an academic lead, not-for-profit, “mega-journal” and monograph publishing pilot. It is exploring a PLOS-style model for the humanities and social sciences – they will publish rigorously peer-reviewed research and aiming to launch without APCs, which is fundamental to their philosophy. They are developing a library partnership subsidy (LPS) model in which libraries each pay a subscription to secure Open Access to works.

- **OpenEdition** Books opened in February 2013 and promotes freemium as a sustainable economic model for Open Access publishing. OpenEdition is a not-for-profit French cyber infrastructure project for OA books supported by four major research and higher education institutions: CNRS, EHESS, Aix-Marseille University and Avignon University. It works with its publisher partners (university press, private publishers and learned societies) to make available titles in Open Access using the freemium model. All titles are available in Open Access as HTML files. Libraries that become members can either acquire the PDF or e-pub versions for their members to have free access to, or they can acquire the books in all formats via individual selection, packages, subscription or perpetual access with local hosting rights. The revenue generated is shared with the publisher.

- **Unglue.it** is a crowdfunding platform, which rewards rights holders for making their ebooks available to the world under a Creative Commons license.

- **Ubiquity Press** was founded by researchers at UCL and is a fully Open Access publisher which makes all electronic formats of the monograph available online with a print-on-demand option. Their model is based on a chapter processing charge of around £150 and a workflow to keep the production costs efficient. The profit from the print on demand is shared with the author or re-invested in new titles. Ebooks are shared via DOAB.

### 6.2 University Press activities

University Presses are also actively experimenting with OA book publishing:

- **Sydney University Press** (part of the joined-up Sydney eScholarship infrastructure)
- **Cornell University's Internet-First University Press**, which is based upon the institutional repository
- **MIT Press**, which has published occasional monographs in the past and has recently launched an Open Access edited book series
- **Athabasca University Press**, a completely Open Access publisher
• **Ohio State University Press**, which makes certain monographs free to download from its website

• **Amsterdam University Press**, which deposits the digital full-text of its books, where authors agree, in Amsterdam University's repository

• **Manchester University Press** founding member of OAPEN, offering authors a number of Gold Open Access routes to publish their monographs.

• **Open Humanities Press** and **Digital Culture** – Journals and books Open Access publisher, part of the Michigan Publishing at the **University of Michigan Library**.

• **Amherst College Press**, when it is launched. Amherst College Press will publish new works by Liberal Arts scholars. Its publications will be made freely available under Olicenses. In the first instance, Amherst College Press is being supported by two positions funded by the library. It is also raising funds to support additional positions and to support its on-going running costs.

• The **University of Pittsburgh Press** and the Pittsburgh University Library System (ULS) have formed a partnership to make books published by the Press freely available online. Pitt Press has selected 762 monographs for Open Access.

• **Harvard University Press** In 2008, Harvard University becomes the first North American university to mandate that all faculty research must be available via Open Access.

• **Computers and Composition Digital Press (CCDP)** are an imprint of **Utah State University Press**.

• **Columbia University Press** runs the **Gutenberg-e** Open Access site “These award winning monographs, coordinated with the American Historical Association, afford emerging scholars new possibilities for online publications”.

• **Rice University** has partnered with the non-profit publisher **OpenStax College** to produce open access textbooks for several of their introductory courses. The books will cover sociology, anatomy, physics, and biology. The textbooks will be freely available online for anyone around the world. OpenStax is funded by grants from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the 20 Million Minds Foundation and the Maxfield Foundation.

• **Yale University Press** participated in the Caravan project, a program financed by the MacArthur Foundation, which allows the involved presses to publish books in numerous formats simultaneously (in POD hardback, paperback, digital, and audio formats).

• **University of California Press** in 2011 decided to cease publication of its FlashPoint series, which launched in 2006 and specialized in scholarly literary studies titles that were released in simultaneous trade paperback and free electronic editions.

• **Pennsylvania State University Press** publishes an Open Access monograph series on Romance Languages and Literatures. It gives readers the options to view the content freely online and to purchase a print edition.
• **University of Tennessee Libraries** launched its digital imprint Newfound Press in 2008. It is digital only providing Open Access to all titles with some POD.

### 6.3 Commercial Publishing Initiatives

- **Palgrave Open** offers authors and their funders the option to publish Open Access (OA) research across all publication formats. Palgrave Macmillan journal articles, monographs and Palgrave Pivot publications can now be made available with immediate open access upon publication. Their current Open Access publication charges are $18,000 for a monograph and $12,500 for a “pivot” title. Palgrave Open content is freely available and searchable via Palgrave Macmillan’s journals website or ebook platform, Palgrave Connect.

- **Bloomsbury Academic** is the scholarly imprint of the British trade house, Bloomsbury Publishing. Initially publishing exclusively in HSS they make all their titles available free of charge online, with free HTML downloads, for non-commercial purposes immediately upon publication, using Creative Commons licences. The works will also be sold as books, using the latest POD technologies, or e-pub versions for around $83.

- **O'Reilly** has published a number of Open Books - books with various forms of "open" copyright – for a number of years. O’Reilly allows authors to download free PDF versions whilst they sell print versions through traditional channels.

- **Polimetrica** is an Italian (scientific) academic publisher that allows authors to have their publications "Open Access": readers can buy the printed version or read for free the full online version in PDF format. Most publications however are in Italian or English.

- **Re.press** is a Melbourne based Open Access publisher of contemporary philosophy. It seeks to promote philosophical ideas through making its works available for free in electronic form (PDF downloads) under a creative commons license, in addition to hard-copy paper backs which are sold.

- **Brill** extended its Open Access publishing to include books in August 2013. Authors retain copyright of their work in exchange for a Book Publication Charge (BPC). Upon receipt of the BPC, the title is made freely accessible on Brill’s Online Books and Journals platform under a Creative Commons license: CC-BY or CC-BY-NC. The type of license determines the applicable rights and the level of the Book Publication Charge (BPC).

- **De Gruyter** the academic publisher based in Berlin and **Unglue.it** have demonstrated that crowdfunding can be applied to Open Access. Users can contribute whatever amount they choose to a title, if a required amount of money is achieved, the book will be freed under Creative Commons license CC-BY-NC-ND. De Gruyter will be offering 100 titles from its edition series at the Unglue.it platform. Each title that raises $2,100 at the site will be made available worldwide as open access content.
• **NCBI Bookshelf** provides free access to books and documents in life science and healthcare. A vital node in the data-rich resource network at NCBI, Bookshelf enables users to easily browse, retrieve, and read content, and spurs discovery of related information.

### 6.4 Prevalent business models

Monograph publishers striving to attain OA are struggling with how to continue to provide stringent peer review and quality while preserving their economic viability and sustainability. Common business models include:

- **PDF free**: the publisher makes the PDF version of the monograph freely available online. The publisher is free to sell the print and other electronic formats, such as epub, Kindle edition;
- **HTML free**: the publisher makes the HTML version of the monograph available online in Open Access at no charge to the author. Only the HTML version is free to view online. Charges are made to download the title in various formats including PDF, e-pub and print;
- **Crowd-sourcing**: the publisher applies a crowdfunding model to hit a target price, at which point the title is released in Open Access in all electronic formats. This model is mostly being used to release older back-list titles;
- **Library-funded Open Access**: libraries group together to meet the price the publisher has agreed is required to release the monograph in Open Access in digital formats;
- **Freemium**: a combination of free access to information and commercialization of premium services to libraries and the general public as well. The publisher or platform provider combines Open Access and paid-for services to generate income to give back to the content providers and to contribute to the sustainability of the platform. There is no charge to the author;
- **Author pays**: a number of these business models are an author-pays model, as with Journals Open Access publishing, some models rely on the author paying some charge either as part of the production process or as a fee. In some cases these will be funded by grants, or support from the University.

The variety of models being explored reflects the recognition that funding in the Humanities and Social Sciences is not straightforward, that the monograph business model is in a delicate balance, and that affordability and sustainability are critical factors in any move to an Open Access environment.
7.0 Options

There is a significant amount of experimentation currently in Open Access book publishing, both amongst established publishers and via emerging initiatives.

Open Access could help the HSS monograph crisis in a number of ways:

- By making a digital edition freely available, the access to and discoverability of the monograph are greatly improved, helping to increase readership and foster new connections and research;
- The Open Access model provides the opportunity to find a new sustainable business model for monographs;
- Altruistic: gives society access to knowledge, and brings the University Press back to the values of the Academy it serves;
- Allows for diversity: books are varied, and authors want different things from their publishers. Some will want to experiment with open peer review and new ways of exposing the process of writing a book; others will be keen to integrate different types of content such as data, video, text. Others are going to be more concerned about brand and reach.

However, there are many challenges to Open Access becoming the prevalent model for monograph publishing. These can be divided into three critical areas:

Costs
Monographs, which frequently run at least ten times the length of an article, are much more costly to produce. Unlike a Journal issue where maybe 10-20 authors may be submitting articles, the costs for a monograph would be covered by one (or a few) authors. The costs of an OA edition is calculated as the first copy costs of a book, based on all the costs that go into producing the digital file of the publication and Palgrave Macmillan put this price at $18,000 for a monograph (likewise a book with SpringerOpen costs €15,000). OAPEN-NL also state that on average, the total costs for creating a monograph in the Netherlands is about €12,000.

Funding
Grant money for books is not nearly as generous as it is for scientific articles. This is related to the fact that books are disproportionately based in the humanities, whereas the sciences are more article-driven. The OAPEN-UK HSS Researcher Survey\(^3\) examined the source of

\(^3\) [http://oapen-uk.jiscebooks.org/research-findings/researchersurvey/](http://oapen-uk.jiscebooks.org/research-findings/researchersurvey/)
funding for research underpinning authors’ last HSS monograph and found that only 22% came from research council grants, whereas 62% came from core university funds or self-funding. If the business model to support the publication of an Open Access monograph requires a fee to be paid by the author – and that author hasn’t received a research council grant – the question is where will the funding come from and how, if a book is a lot more expensive to produce than an article, will it be affordable and sustainable?

It may be that funders will become more supportive in the future – there are several indicators of change outside of North America. In the UK, in October 2013 the Wellcome Trust extended its Open Access policy to include monographs and book chapters. The Horizon 2020 program, the EU’s plans for research and innovation funding from 2014-2020, will apply to monographs as well as journal articles. But change will likely be slow to come, and will likely favor well-funded institutions and academics.

Author attitudes
Perhaps of even more significance, is the potential lack of motivation for change amongst authors themselves. Our survey of faculty attitudes shows some level of dissatisfaction with the current publishing processes, but on the whole these relate to traditional publisher functions such as quality of editorial support, speed of publishing, levels of royalties and marketing. In terms of selecting a publisher, very few authors ranked “publisher makes your book freely available” as an important feature (8% selected this as most important, compared to 48% for the “prestige of publisher”). In addition, although a level of interest in new media and innovative new formats is expressed, a driving demand for innovation (e.g. integrating blogs, multi-media, images and wikis etc.) wasn’t seen in the survey results. The current system of publishing a book with a prestigious press is tightly linked to tenure and promotion. For any new model of monograph publishing to succeed, there needs to be a change in attitudes towards what constitutes high quality scholarship, beyond the brand of the publisher that an academic publishes with.

However, there is certainly interest in new short-form publications and also in the launch of an innovative new Press – but this Press would need to offer the traditional services AND deliver these better than established publishers AS WELL AS offering an affordable and sustainable model of Open Access. A new Press would need the backing of tenure and promotion committees for its new format publishing; an association with academics and institutions of national standing to quickly build prestige; and a rigorous selection/commissioning strategy to ensure publication of the highest quality work.

There are clearly many opportunities for innovation in monograph publishing. The question for the Oberlin Group is what role a group of Liberal Arts Colleges can and should take in order to meet the mission of this project: to produce scholarship in the fields comprising
the liberal arts on which our faculty, students and graduates rely, by leveraging new technologies and Open Access principles to publish quality work.

Certainly, the Oberlin Group would bring a particular dynamic to a new initiative that could be extremely attractive:

- A focus on interdisciplinary topics that showcases broad thinking;
- Access to a network of prestigious academics and institutions;
- Publications that build on the special student-faculty relationship that Liberal Arts Colleges encourage;
- A not-for-profit ethos that places quality and usefulness at the heart of its operation;
- An enthusiasm for new technologies and experimental approaches to helping develop, share and evaluate an author’s work;
- A commitment to sustainable Open Access publishing that helps open up knowledge and increase public engagement with research.

Together, the Oberlin Group members manage a substantial budget for content acquisition. By repurposing a proportion of this budget to support new, more open forms of publishing, the Group could help support changes in the industry that will ultimately have benefits not only for individual member Colleges, but also well beyond. However, that investment can’t be made speculatively, and there are several potential ways forward that would need to be evaluated.

### 7.1 Launching a new publishing venture

Through this review, and in consultation with the Task Force, we have identified several potential next steps for the Oberlin Group in meeting the mission of the Lever Initiative.

The original stated ambition of the Lever Initiative was to investigate the feasibility of launching a new, innovative Open Access press. Core principles for this Press were stated as:

1. We will experiment with “medium-form narratives” or “scholarly novellas”: narratives longer than the journal articles to which the open-access movement now largely devotes itself, but shorter than tomes that struggle to find readers;
2. All “books” (for lack of a better term) will be Open Access and thus freely available to anybody with an Internet connection;
3. We will only publish work with a good chance of finding a meaningful audience. We have no interest in producing work nobody wants to read;
4. We will employ excellent editors, equal or superior to editors at other university presses. These editors will be entrepreneurial, actively seeking and soliciting good manuscripts. Our editors will establish outstanding lists in their fields of specialty;
5. The quality of our publications should be apparent to all. Nobody will ask of our publications, “Yes, but is this scholarship?” The press will produce peer-reviewed works with complete credibility among peers;
6. We will be a first-choice press. Works published will have a positive impact in their respective fields;
7. We will align the mission of this venture with the mission of our institutions, thus gaining support from deans, provosts, and presidents;
8. We will not partner with an existing press. There is strong evidence that such an alliance would prevent our ability to be innovative and nimble;
9. The venture as a whole must be financially solvent and sustainable over the long term. It is in nobody's interest to produce “one-offs”;
10. We will not develop a new platform for our work, but rather identify an existing platform best suited to our needs.

In general terms, our research supports these principles as being good ones for a new Press. Our research into a potential opportunity for the Oberlin Group in establishing a new OA Press suggests some minor revisions and changes of emphasis as follows:

1. The new Press needs a strong niche - a focus on a short-form monograph format in topics of broad, interdisciplinary interest would be distinctive, and a good match with Oberlin Group capabilities and interests;
2. A network of influential academics would need to be recruited to give the new Press immediate prestige; investment would also need to be made in the brand and marketing of the Press to give it a strong and credible presence from launch;
3. Advocacy work to influence tenure and promotion committees would be required to ensure that authors would feel supported in publishing with the new Press; innovation with metrics/publication performance assessment should form a central part of the new Press’s mission and services (e.g. article level metrics/altmetrics etc.), even if this took time to become meaningful in supporting career progression;
4. The Press should focus on commissioned publications from academics of national standing in the early establishment of the brand, combined with identifying up and coming authors writing on topics of real interest and broad relevance;
5. Key traditional publishing services should be delivered really well and through innovative new approaches: for example, editorial and peer-review services should be supportive, interactive and hands-on to help authors develop their work to the highest
possible standard; workflow support should provide authors with transparency on the progress of their manuscript; advanced marketing tools should be made available to authors to help them publicise their work; post-publication performance dashboards should be made available to authors and so on;

6. Selective use of new media should be made where this enhances the online version of the publication; a print-on-demand option should be available as an alternative to the free online edition;

7. A business model should be developed that helps minimize costs to the author – for example, via sponsorship or “institutional membership” funding.

There are several ways that the Oberlin Group could move forward with this publishing venture, ranging from a small-scale enterprise funded by donations from Oberlin Group members through to seeking external funding to launch a major new Press.

This option is clearly attractive in terms of demonstrating by example that Open Access can be applied successfully to monograph publishing; and the Oberlin Group are well placed to leverage its network and unique attributes to create a strong proposition for authors. However, establishing a new Press will require significant work and investment, even at a relatively modest level. It is clear that authors will demand a high quality service with the traditional elements that they currently receive from established publishers, so those need to be in place ahead of innovative formats and presentation, for which there is significantly less demand currently. The OA fees will need to be affordable to ensure that cost doesn’t become a barrier to publication. Bringing all these elements together represents a significant challenge.

7.2 Collaborating with existing publishing ventures

As demonstrated in section 6.0, there are already a plethora of Open Access initiatives relating to book publishing in the humanities. There is definitely a niche that Oberlin Group might explore (as laid in in section 7.1), however this is likely to be a costly route and carries a level of risk with it – as with launching any new initiative. One way to reduce that risk is to collaborate with other projects/organizations and make use of their existing infrastructure and expertise.

Currently, the market for Open Access books in America and the UK is relatively undeveloped. There are many more initiatives in Europe, Canada and Australia. The OAPEN Foundation is probably the most significant initiative, based in the Netherlands and working with 55 publishers, producing 3000+ books with 95% of these in the humanities. As monograph publishing has become more and more difficult, OAPEN is experiencing more demand from authors. They are looking to partner beyond Europe and may be a good
starting point for Oberlin Group in researching how best to establish a new Press. Other potential partners could be Open Monograph Press, the Library Publishing Consortium (recently established to help libraries with an interest in publishing unite and share experiences) and the American Association of University Presses.

The Oberlin Group could take collaboration one step further, and seek to partner with an existing Press to launch a new OA monograph series (as outlined in section 7.1), using their infrastructure but providing input into and investment to support the OA business model and technology developments required to create an innovative service. Also the Oberlin Group would lead on a commissioning strategy and leverage its network to ensure the right people are in place to give the new series brand impact and credibility. Potential partners would include an existing University Press, or even the new Press recently launched by Amherst College – a publishing initiative that already exists within the Oberlin Group.

7.3 Supporting “unlocking” initiatives

As outlined in section 6.1, there are currently several “unlocking” initiatives through which funds are raised by libraries to make publications available Open Access (e.g. Unglue.it and KnowledgeUnlatched). It’s likely to take thousands of libraries collaborating rather than hundreds to significantly increase the volume of high quality OA content available, and this is certainly one route towards achieving this. The Oberlin Group could achieve many of the objectives of the Lever Initiative through donating a proportion of its acquisition budget as part of a large consortium of libraries to help pay to make books freely available online. However, this route is limited in terms of encouraging innovative approaches, new formats and better author services.

An alternative approach might be for the Oberlin Group to establish a commissioning consortium. This would work on similar principles to the “unlocking” initiatives outlined above with one critical difference – libraries would be the funder rather than publishers. Libraries would collaborate to donate funds to a central budget that publishers would then apply to for funding. In this way, Oberlin Group would be able to decide which projects to support (thereby having editorial control) and the resultant publication would be freely available online, with publishers free to raise additional revenues through selling print copies etc.

7.4 Advocacy

Our research, particularly amongst faculty, reveals a level of conservatism towards new publishing approaches that may significantly hamper the success of new OA publishing
initiatives. There is a clear and much needed role for the Oberlin Group to bring attention to some of these issues and work with partners to advocate change to smooth the way for new approaches to publishing to be adopted by the liberal arts community. The Oberlin Group could set up a series of working groups to tackle the barriers that are currently hampering uptake of OA, such as the established system for tenure and promotion, conservatism relating to new formats for publications, funding support for OA relating to books, publication performance assessment (altmetrics, reader engagement measures etc.) and so on. The work of these groups could be knitted together under the already established brand of the Lever Initiative, with an assertive marketing program to ensure widespread awareness and increased international engagement. Of course, this option could also be taken forward alongside any of the others summarized within this document.
8.0 Summary and recommendations

Monograph publishing is not sustainable under the current model – like the “serials crisis” of the 90s, it is likely that market forces will increasingly dictate that new approaches are going to be required. At the same time, new technology offers us the opportunity to greatly enhance the monograph format and make the content more useful and accessible.

The Oberlin Group has an ambitious vision to transform the current process of publishing books into something that is more open and progressive, with a focus on producing really good, useful scholarship that people want to read.

The Lever Initiative has helped demonstrate that there is an exciting opportunity for innovation in this sector, but attitudes amongst authors remain somewhat conservative. There are already a range of initiatives underway, but as yet a strong lead has yet to emerge within the USA – although the Library Publishing Coalition is making strides forward here, and is already supported by over 50 college and university libraries within North America.

Our research indicates there is an opportunity for the establishment of a publishing program/Press for a new, short-format monograph, which blends use of new technologies with the traditional editorial, production and distribution support services that authors value. That program could be run in partnership with an existing publisher, a new Press could be established, or a more inventive solution could be found, such as the library commissioning group as outlined in section 7.3.

Oberlin Group needs to test its appetite for developing such a program based on the results of this research. If there is strong backing to further invest in such an initiative, then the next steps would be to more fully evaluate the cost-benefit of the options laid out in the previous paragraph. Without that backing, the Oberlin Group could still make a vital contribution towards meetings its original objectives through an assertive and well-structured program of advocacy.

Whatever the next steps for the Oberlin Group, it’s our hope that the information generated by the Lever Initiative will prove useful to a range of organizations in exploring options for new formats and business models for monograph publishing.