

The Birth and Death of Lists  
Regreening lists, AAUP 2014 @Christie Henry

Planning this got me thinking about trees, and how in many ways the approach to acquisitions can be mapped onto a tree.

You have your roots, most important, but largely out of site—may be your evergreens. The trunk, or bole, lists that do a lot of heavy lifting. And then branches, lots of different directions, lots of different leaves.

Ultimately, when all is healthy and functioning, you have a beautiful specimen. That's the ideal imprint.

Twice a year you have great changes—Chicago we only get two seasons—  
But throughout the year you have more subtle dynamic developments.

Occasionally a branch gets struck by lightning, whole thing comes down—often when an editor leaves, like my former colleague Mr. Devens. Other times, invasive species like Asian Long horned beetle, which might be likened to strong competition from an invading press (some of the beetles from Princeton, and superbugs from Oxford), can cause damage and withering results. Also have the slower die off of age. May occasionally have a gall, that slows growth but that the tree eventually grows around.

It is generally much less risky for that tree to send out new branches, or to trim branches, than it is to hack

away at the trunk. Definitely don't want to mess with the roots.

Say the tree has been having a hard time fully leafing in one section. Check the conditions—enough light, enough Nitrogen or phosphorus? Other trees too close by, cutting off sunlight? Enough acquisitions resources flowing?

We have had a few changes in our branch structure in the last two years, need and opportunity to send out new boughs.

These have been specifically in business and economics, law and linguistics.

Business and Economics: Have wanted this to be a core part of the trunk, as it is in the species of giant redwood we call the University of Chicago itself.

In spite of deep roots and a few leafy years, growth more erratic. A departing editor gave us a chance to reconsider. Had long had our econ editor also handle law. There is synergy there of course, but lawyers send out many more leaves. Econ, like science, driven by articles—books are a species of leaf that is either optional, purely decorative, or occasionally even purposefully pruned off. Tendency was for our editors to gravitate, like birds or howler monkeys, to the parts of the trees with more leaves. We even had a recent one start acquiring in a new area IR, which matched his own professional training but was not an area we intended to branch into, and yet because it is driven

by dissertations, and there are healthy degrees of low hanging fruit, we ended up quickly gaining a list in this area, and yet one that we then ultimately had to let die off, in less than elegant ways.

So with a departure, and stemming from conversations we had been having for several years about the need for a stronger bough in econ, we decided to divide the braches into two editors—hire an econ editor to focus only on business, finance and econ. Hire a separate editor for Law, AND?

On economics,

Our sense, and analysis of competition, suggested that there was enough to sustain a full time econ editor at a press of our size. And with a range of books, from specialist to trade to professional to course books. Initial goal was to sign one of each form the first year.

Fortunate relatively early to acquire a trade book also by a U of C faculty member, into which we poured extra developmental editing, and a rush growth season from ms to book. Sometimes growing conditions just perfect, as they have been in this case, already signs that this is adding more leafs, also sending nutrients into the trunk.

In addition to this book, we have agreed to prioritize fiscally this list, in part because we are aware of the rise in econ in public culture, just as we saw our life science list grow coincident with the acute public

interest in life science. Means we have knowingly paid more for some projects than they will likely recoup, and that is also a luxury of a Press with resources to do so. Even with that agreement, some of those invasive competing presses still pay more, so we have bid on a wider range of projects knowing that we will lose a number in competition.

On the law side, much as we like the legal leaves, we didn't see a whole branch leafing with these, so it left us with a half of an editor, and prospects. An area of Redwood proportions in our landscape, the University, had really blossomed in linguistics, with the University regrowing its crown in recent years. We had closed the list about ten years ago, with another editor departure, and it had been one of those galls I mentioned—lots of complaints from faculty and authors about how we lopped off that branch.

Took the occasion to fill the other half of law with linguistics.

As one of the resident arborists, editorial directors, I knew this would not be easy to sprout. Finding an editor able to comprehend linguistics is one thing. But it also meant growing in another discipline not driven by books. Knew in this case that flow of University resources could help, spent a lot of time building rapport with faculty in advance of hire, sowing seeds, and using the creation of a faculty series to launch the list.

The extension of two distinct branches—for econ and business, and law and linguistics, required investment

from acquisitions. A new Editorial Associate to support the two editors, essentially doubling up on travel and entertainment budgets, readers honoraria, offices—we have a little niche competition in this area at the Press—particularly when it comes to sunlight needed for photosynthesis—i.e the windowed offices.

Also entails discussion with other departments. Initially volume of books not likely to inundate or overwhelm, but immediately need investment in exhibits, at least a presence. Also anticipating the types of books differ—find the leaves may be more prickly or serrated from time to time. Linguistics and econ lots of LaTeX. We don't have ms editors who work in LaTeX, more vendors. We have fewer freelancers in our fold who are versed in these types of books. Also different reliance on illustrations—aren't talking beautiful landscape paintings. Crude line drawings. We are experienced with these from the science list, and parts of our poli sci list, but it has taken quite a few decades to shift parts of the workflow and approach to books away from a purely humanities driven style.

Disciplinary styles differ as well, which has implications for marketing and publicity, and also design, production, and pricing. Does the competition necessitate original paperbacks, or will cloth be feasible And what may be a species of generalist book in one discipline doesn't

In each of these cases, it has been essential that our expectations also have to be realistic. These are not fast growing trees like the willows and poplars that

pervade the humanities. Books, if written often take years to come to maturity. These are more like the trees featured in our *Oldest Living Things in the world* book, some grow just micrometers a day. But because some of these authors may only ever write one book in a lifetime, those they do write tend to be deliberate and showy, like the flowers on a tulip tree.

It is also a case that a lot of the book ideas will shrivel and fall off the branch before ever leafing. Because scholars in these fields don't need books for credentialing, there is no guarantee they will eventually submit manuscripts. This is a tricky environment which we have adapted to in the sciences, and so we in some ways want to map that onto these other areas—involves putting more projects under contract than you think will ever fully mature. We had to establish realistic goals for signings, and for publications, assuming a five year trajectory to maturity at least. We also have tasked each editor, after a year, to now think about how best to bound their programs and ensure a list identity, but initially we felt it was better just to reach for the sunlight, rather than limit that reach too much.

In making decisions about revitalizing, or regreening, the lists, we again took stock of what that big old Redwood University had to offer. For linguistics, it was the series board of faculty, but also buy-in for the series from the linguistics department chair. In econ, it was engaging help from our provost and Board chair in appointing an econ faculty member to our Board. And we also published a collection of papers for a prominent business school faculty member, but for the

Booth School, and ran it outside of workflow—we had a vendor.

These are two lists as well in which we have had real stellar titles populating our backlist landscape—species known as the Hayek tree.

We have made sure these backlist titles are refreshed with new covers, or branded as definitive editions, so as to invoke our history.

These are also two areas in which, because the University is sowing its own seeds, we have routine visitors and colloquia on campus—chance to meet many visiting faculty, and hence reduce our own travel costs for acquiring editors—does not take a lot of resource expenditures to get across campus, at least in months other than Jan or Feb.

Just like with trees, best to look at their structure and health through the light at different points of the day, and across the seasons. Need to sometimes prune, even aggressively, thin out to allow new branches to grow.

There are risks. We could be sending out too many new branches, end up crowding ourselves out. Or letting the crown get too top heavy, puts undue pressure on the roots. Or we could, as I hope, do so well that we'll need to fell all those trees for paper to print enough copies for demand.

