

1 May 2019

Dear Provost Drell,

The Modern Language Association of America applauds your rethinking the decision to eliminate the university subsidy for Stanford University Press and urges the university to retain its commitment the press for the long term, well beyond the proposed one-year funding extension.

Leland and Jane Stanford envisioned the Press in 1891, in a memo of understanding with the university's first president, David Starr Jordan, recognizing that a world-class university should also make "provision for the publication of the results of any important research on the part of professors or advanced students." Other universities acknowledged this obligation of a university to disseminate the work of scholars beyond the academy walls and followed Stanford in establishing presses.

University presses are especially crucial to the dissemination of scholarship in the humanities. They play a key role in encouraging and refining the work of new scholars through the publication of journal articles and first books that establish credentials, develop authorial presence in the field, and shake up intellectual conventions. Through a rigorous peer-review process and a faculty publication-committee review, university presses test the validity and soundness of scholarship and maintain the highest standards for academic publication. These presses cultivate authors—junior and senior—and work with them to develop their books so that their ideas are presented in a clear and intelligible manner to reach the widest readership possible, without sacrificing intellectual rigor or richness of ideas. University press editors also notice trends and emerging areas of research and publish the resulting work before a field has been established in the academy or has become widely accepted as an important topic and before anyone knows how much a part of the general conversation it will become.

University presses curate, edit, shape, and design; they launch an author's ideas into the wider world and generate conversations around them globally. They extend the reputation of their universities since their books and journals are found in libraries, bookstores, and on Web sites that are frequented by scholars on all continents. Finally, and most important in today's rapidly changing digital world, university presses innovate and experiment with new forms of publication, most recently with digital-only, short-form writing; enhanced e-books; and large scholarly sites—often in collaboration with their own research libraries and with scholarly associations, so that they can disseminate scholarship in whatever format is most suited to the work. University presses and research libraries together facilitate scholarly communication, the lifeblood of the university.

Stanford University Press (like the MLA itself) has been a pioneer in experimenting with digital projects that reimagine the future of scholarly communication; with Stanford's stature, access to the technology sector, and prestigious business school, it's all the more disappointing and short sighted to make cuts to the press rather than look for potentially fruitful collaborations and innovative solutions.

University presses such as Stanford's contribute enormously to the parent university's prestige. The vast majority (79 percent) of AAU institutions have presses, as do 71 percent of R1 universities. Every university press book on every scholar's bookshelf is promoting a university's reputation.

The decisions higher education leaders make today will have direct impact on generations of students--on what and how they learn, the tools they have to interpret the world around them, and the possibilities they envision for the future. We urge you to hold fast to the key role Stanford University Press has played in advancing knowledge in the humanities through the Stanford University Press and to allow the press to continue its role as an innovator in knowledge production and dissemination for generations to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paula M Krebs". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and a long, sweeping underline.

Paula M Krebs  
Executive Director