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Around the Columns

Future plans announced for University of Missouri Press

A new model for the [University of Missouri Press](#) was unveiled July 16 that emphasizes digital technologies and student participation. Also, MU will resume governance of the press, which had been managed by the University of Missouri System since 1967.

The announcement came nearly two months after UM System President Timothy M. Wolfe revealed that the Missouri Press was closing after 54 years due to fiscal challenges.

Speer Morgan was named director of the new press and will continue as editor of *The Missouri Review*, a literary quarterly. He will report to Michael O'Brien, dean of the [College of Arts and Science](#). The University of Missouri Press offices will be in McReynolds Hall near *The Missouri Review* offices.

Morgan said he plans to hire a Missouri Press editor in chief, managing editor and marketing director within the next three months.

The new Missouri Press model will be similar to that at the *Columbia Missourian* and *The Missouri Review*, where faculty and students work together in a real-world media environment. Applying the model to Missouri Press will enable students to gain hands-on publishing experience. "The press will be embedded into the broader academic enterprise," Provost Brian Foster says.

Missouri Press will publish about 25 print titles a year, roughly what had been done in recent years. Graduate students and freelance editors will perform the bulk of the manuscript editing. A board consisting of representatives of all four campuses will give input on acquisitions and editorial content. Contracts with current and past authors will be honored, and the press will solicit for new manuscripts.

“The press function of disseminating scholarly information will not change,” Foster says.

Its budget hasn’t been decided yet, but Foster says he expects it be less than the previous model, which received an annual subsidy of \$400,000 from the UM System.

The Dean’s Press Advisory Committee was formed July 18 consisting of Morgan; Dean Mills, dean of the School of Journalism; Daniel Clay, dean of the College of Education; Scott Cairns, a professor of American literature; and Jim Cogswell, director of MU Libraries.

The committee will advise O’Brien on a future course for Missouri Press, Morgan says.

Missouri Press history

Opened in 1958, Missouri Press has published more than 2,000 books on world history, biography, journalism, women’s studies and creative nonfiction. It is a leader in scholarship on Missouri natives Mark Twain, Langston Hughes and Harry S Truman. Notable titles are *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes* and *Mark Twain and His Circle*.

In recent years, most book publishers, newspapers and magazines have experienced a sales decline as more readers turn to the Internet for news, information and entertainment. Scholarly presses have not been immune, and a handful of university publishing houses besides Missouri’s have shut down or suspended operation.

Given the changing media landscape, the Missouri Press will be forward thinking and innovative in its approach to scholarly publishing, Morgan said. There will be more ebooks, audio books and intercampus collaboration with the [School of Journalism](#), [Trulaske College of Business](#) and other academic units — all goals of Mizzou Advantage’s Media of the Future initiative.

[Media of the Future](#) “provides a platform to reinvent the role of university presses in future scholarly communications and outreach to the public,” MU Chancellor Brady J. Deaton said in a press release. “The interdisciplinary foundations of the Mizzou Advantage enable a reimagined press to draw on significant campus strengths such as *The Missouri Review* and to build on scholarly programs in English, creative writing, communications, journalism, and library and information science.”

When Wolfe announced in May the press closing, there was outcry among some authors, alumni and professors. In the days after the announcement, a Facebook page dedicated to saving the press was created. An online petition asking Wolfe to reconsider the closing had 4,700 signatures by mid July.

Moving forward

Morgan is not blind to the controversy. “I understand the concern,” he says. “The leaders on this campus feel the same way, which is the reason for this effort. Our hope is to have a press that is economically as efficient as possible, adventurous with its book list, which also serves a broad educational and experimental function in the future of books.”

The digital road of scholarly publishing is a little bumpy. Rice University’s publishing house

went digital for a few years but shut down in 2010. But [Project Muse](#), an online database for scholarly journals overseen by the Johns Hopkins University Press, has had success; *The Missouri Review* has been on the site since the early 2000s. Seven months ago, Project Muse began offering digital “top quality book-length scholarship,” according to its website.

Morgan is aware of the challenges, and he stresses the new Missouri Press won’t be an overnight transition. Putting a new model in operation takes time. “In about a year, we should have our feet under us,” Morgan says.

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