

Discipline-Specific Analysis of University Press Production: Art History and Its Specialties

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Purposes: This study seeks to understand trends in the monographic output of university presses in a specific discipline: visual arts and architecture; and to do so at a level of detail that is meaningful for the discipline's specialties. We also want to test the viability of using book vendor data for this form of assessment. This work has developed from a consultancy for the Samuel H. Kress Foundation.

This research builds upon two previous studies: the 2006 exploratory study "The State of Scholarly Publishing in the History of Art and Architecture" undertaken by Lawrence T. McGill and covering more general trends in art history publications from roughly 1985 to 2005, and the broader, 1990 study conducted by the American Association of University Presses surveying the monographic production of its members: "The Rate of Publication of Scholarly Monographs in the Humanities and Social Sciences 1978-1988." The first of these used data from the *Global Books In Print* database that had been categorized by the database publisher using headings such as "Art History" and others, but did not attempt to break the data into specialized areas of media, (e.g. architecture), chronological (e.g. Renaissance) or geographical focus. The broadly interdisciplinary AAUP study used data reported by member publishers which did include chronological and geographical categories, but not at a level sufficiently granular to describe specialties in any one discipline. The present study concentrates on assigning specific categories to data that could be meaningful to participants within arts disciplines.

Design/Methodology/Approach: All records for university press books classified in arts categories (of the Library of Congress Classification) were extracted from YBP Library Services' GOBI database and assigned categories for media, geography, chronology, and cultures. One set of these categories was based upon the chapters in a textbook for the history of art that is widely used in comprehensive survey courses. The records from 1991 through 2007 were deemed sufficiently comprehensive to represent the output of university presses. The share of production held by various specialties within these disciplines was charted. Statistical hypothesis testing was used to identify meaningful changes in these shares over the period of study. A team of advisors from publishing, art history, and librarianship commented on the research at several stages.

Findings: Overall, production of art books increased substantially during this period. (This finding was reinforced by the previous studies and by previously published data sets.) For university press books, topics related to recent art (art of all nations from 1945 to the present) showed a much more dramatic increase than other areas in the arts. Topics related to the nineteenth century showed the most dramatic decrease in share of production (yet a steady rate of production in raw numbers.) A slight increase in North American subjects and corresponding

decreases in European and Asian topics raises questions about multiculturalism in this form of publishing. While the book vendor data available for this study proved effective for assessment of university presses during these years, it did not perform as well for analyzing trade publications in this discipline.

Practical Implications/Value: Any academic discipline is composed of a number of specialties and understanding the rise and fall of these specialties is critical to understanding, serving, or promoting the discipline. This study was initiated at the request of the Kress Foundation as one of several possible measures of intra-disciplinary dynamics. As the need to facilitate scholarly communications brings libraries and university presses into closer partnerships, the metrics of these two professions can be examined to mutual benefit. Preparation of a good strategy for collection development or for a business plan for publishing can benefit from similar data support. This project also required the type of cooperation between publishers, academics, and librarians that is characteristic of scholarly communications initiatives.