

MEMORANDUM

TO: SSSP Editorial & Publications Committee
FROM: Susan M. Carlson, Treasurer and Chair, Ad Hoc Publisher Search Committee
DATE: August 9, 2013
RE: Recommendation for Publisher of *Social Problems*

Search Process

Early in 2013, our committee developed a request for proposals to be disseminated to potential publishers of *Social Problems*. The RFP asked publishers to include specific strategies for working with the Society to accomplish three goals—(1) recoup lost institutional subscriptions (which dropped by about 24% between 2006 and 2012), (2) increase the international content and visibility of the journal, and (3) increase domestic and, especially, international membership in the Society. The latter two goals were adopted at the Board and Permanent Organization and Strategic Planning Committee retreat in 2007. In addition, the RFP requested that proposals include the publisher's overall vision for the future of the journal, and how this vision meshes with the mission and goals of the publisher.

At the beginning of February, the RFP was sent to eight publishers—Elsevier, Oxford University Press, Routledge, Taylor & Francis, SAGE, Springer, University of California Press, University of Chicago Press, and Wiley Blackwell. All but University of Chicago Press responded and submitted proposals by the April 15 deadline. Interestingly, the editorial board and finance committee of one of the publishers, Oxford University Press (OUP), vetted the quality of the journal and its finances before agreeing to submit a bid, and were very favorably impressed. The current and past editors of *Social Problems* deserve recognition for this achievement. OUP publishes a select list of high quality, high impact factor journals, and to be part of that list is a true honor.

The Ad Hoc Publisher Search Committee—Héctor L. Delgado, David Smith, and I—read all seven proposals and agreed that Elsevier, Springer, and Wiley Blackwell were out of the running as they had financial offers that would yield less income than current arrangements with UC Press, were a poor fit in terms of the proposed marketing model, and/or had limited or low impact factor sociology/social science lists. The remaining publishers—Oxford, Routledge, SAGE, and UC Press were invited to interview with our committee prior to the annual meeting in New York City. They also were asked to reconsider their financial offers, and they responded favorably. In addition, UC Press was asked to reformulate its financial offer to be consistent with requirements outlined in the RFP as their initial proposal assumed going to six issues in 2015, a 33% increase in the subscription price that year, and taking over copyeditor and

proofreading functions instead of an annual stipend for the editorial office which would have put our production editor out of work and eliminated the opportunity for graduate students to work with the journal, an important professional socialization experience.

The attached table summarizes the financial offers from the four publishers. The Budget, Finance and Audit Committee vetted the financial offers and deemed all as comparable and acceptable. However, the committee and I have strong reservations about the revenue projections of UC Press that are based on unrealistic annual 9% increases in subscription prices and are nearly twice the income generated in 2012 with no substantial changes in marketing strategy.

On Wednesday, Héctor, David, Michele, and I interviewed the four publisher candidates. Each interview was 50 minutes. Each publisher was asked to make a 20 minute presentation highlighting the main points of the proposal with the remaining time allotted for questions and dialogue.

Recommendation

Our committee assessed the relative strengths of the proposals and other evidence such as research on each publisher in terms of the breadth, depth, and quality of their sociology and related social sciences lists, discussions with those who have experience working with each publisher (Claire Renzetti and David Smith are currently editing SAGE journals for example), the concrete evidence of past performance that the publishers provided, and the answers to the tough questions we posed and observations during our interviews. Based on this evidence, the committee unanimously recommends *Oxford University Press* as the Society's new publishing partner for *Social Problems*. Some of the advantages of partnering with Oxford University Press include:

- OUP is a nonprofit, university publisher. It is the largest university press in the world, with a long and distinguished history of publishing academic scholarship dating back to 1586
- OUP has an international reputation as a publisher of the best scholarship in a variety of academic fields. It focuses with "laser-sharp intensity" on the most influential publications in each discipline.
- OUP has the widest global reach with on-the-ground presence in more than 50 countries and a global marketing strategy that is sensitive to cultural differences.
- OUP publishes over 300 journals, mostly as partners with learned societies like SSSP, and 6,000 new books per year
- The OUP team emphasized the content of *Social Problems* and how excited they are to have the opportunity to work with us to disseminate our important scholarship to a global audience.
- OUP has demonstrated successful strategies to market SSSP-sponsored activities such as awards, membership, and our annual meeting (see e.g., 13 of OUP proposal for one such strategy used with *Social Forces*).

- OUP will promote the journal at academic conferences around the world with approximately 50 manned exhibits, and 17 unmanned exhibits (see lists Appendix D).
- OUP has all the latest technological innovations to effectively increase discoverability and usage of *Social Problems* content such a widgets to create a two-way conversation between the SSSP website and the *Social Problems* website, and social media to encourage active engagement with *Social Problems* content.
- OUP’s web host platform is Highwire. Users will have toll-free access to *Social Problems* content discovered by accessing an article by from another Highwire publisher such as SAGE.
- OUP journal sites are mobile-optimized to allow both our members and subscribers to read *Social Problems* on all their mobile devices
- The journal will have a dedicated US-based team in Editorial, Production, Institutional Sales, and Marketing whose members interviewed with us. The team has a level of enthusiasm and excitement about publishing *Social Problems* not exhibited by the other publisher candidates. The synergy among OUP team members was palpable as they discussed the specific production, institutional sales, marketing, and editorial strategies for the journal. In short, we were impressed by each of the team members and their ability to work together, and potential to work with us.
- OUP production has a service to work with foreign scholars in readying their work for publication.
- OUP plans to meet with the E&P and BFA Committees at the annual meeting to jointly develop the year’s marketing and editorial plans
- OUP production facilities are located in Cary, North Carolina. All work is done in house and none is outsourced. Marketing, sales, and editorial offices are in New York.
- OUP will provide SSSP members print copies of the journal if they opt to receive this member benefit in this format at no charge, and complete online access to the entire content of the journal from volume 1.
- OUP will offer SSSP members a 25% discount on all OUP books.

In sum, the committee believes that Oxford University Press is the best publishing partner for SSSP. They are the best positioned and will work with us to reach the Society’s goals of increasing the international visibility and content of the journal, increasing domestic and international membership, and recouping lost institutional subscriptions.

In the unlikely event that a satisfactory contract is not reached with Oxford, or if they should decide to withdraw their offer, the committee recommends SAGE as the alternate publishing partner upported as the second choice by the majority of the committee.

Table 2. Estimated Mean Annual Journal Revenue, Royalty Income Based on Revenue, and Editorial Office Support Under Five-Year Proposed Contracts

Publisher	Estimated Mean Total Revenue [†]	Royalty Percentage [‡]	Estimated Mean Annual Royalty Income to SSSP [§]	Guaranteed Mean Royalty Income to SSSP	Mean Annual Editorial Office Support	Estimated Mean Annual Cash Return to SSSP [¶]	Signing Bonus ^{**}
Oxford University Press	\$454,586	50%	\$227,293	\$170,470	\$106,183	\$333,476	\$0
Routledge	\$468,813	50%	\$234,406	\$180,000	\$114,489	\$348,895	\$0
SAGE	\$470,396	50%	\$235,198	\$150,000	\$100,000	\$335,198	\$100,000
University of California Press	\$552,985	55%	\$304,142	\$225,000	\$94,080	\$398,222	\$0

[†]Total revenue from all sales based on 5% (OUP), 4.5% (Routledge), 6% (SAGE), and 9% (UC Press) annual subscription price increases.

[‡]Percentage of total revenue SSSP will receive as income

[§]Annual estimated income to SSSP

[¶]This includes only estimated royalty income plus editorial office stipend. Publishers offer various other small amounts for other purposes.

^{**}Both Oxford and Routledge initially offered \$100,000 signing bonuses, but much lower royalty percentages (35% and 40%, respectively). Higher royalty percentages were negotiated in lieu of signing bonuses with these publishers. SAGE offered the signing bonus only in their final offer.