



Interview with Amy Brand, MIT Press

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KENNEALLY: What would it take to develop tools, models, and resources that make scholarship more accessible to researchers and other readers around the world? A commitment by one of the world's most respected research institutions, for a good start. The support of a university press certainly would help. And a \$10 million grant from a leading UK philanthropy – that should seal the deal.

Welcome to CCC's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Velocity of Content. In May, MIT Press and the Arcadia Fund put that package together as the Arcadia Open Access Fund. The new fund will support the MIT Press's innovative efforts to publish open access books and journals.

One recent Arcadia-supported effort is shift+OPEN, designed to flip existing subscription-based journals to a diamond open access publishing model. Together, these initiatives are making the six-decade-old MIT Press celebrated as a pioneer in open access and as a publishing partner of research by leading authors in science and technology, as well as social sciences, arts, and humanities.

Amy Brand, director of the MIT Press, joins me now from Cambridge, Massachusetts. Welcome to Velocity of Content, Amy.

BRAND: I'm delighted to be here and to see you again, Chris. Thank you.

KENNEALLY: Very nice to see you as well. And congratulations on the \$10 million Arcadia Fund grant which was announced in May. How will MIT Press use the Arcadia Fund grant to advance its open access publishing objectives?

BRAND: Thanks for asking. Of course, we're really honored by Arcadia and excited to have this commitment. I should clarify up front that it's actually an endowment, right? So it's not an outright grant, in the sense that what we will be using and the main reason we're using it is to accelerate our capacity to experiment with different types of models is the interest from that investment. There's also a matching component. So it is intended to be an inspiration to other supporters, potentially, to contribute to these efforts at the press.

But to answer your question, it's really around the capacity to experiment with new models. At present, there also are some instances in which we will be using the funds to



support or backstop other transitional models that are in process, but we're always thinking ahead to new sustainable open publishing models for books and journals.

KENNEALLY: And shift+OPEN, which was announced in February, invites subscription-supported scholarly journal publishers to apply for grants that support a transition to an open access business model. Who can apply for shift+OPEN, and what is the special appeal with diamond open access?

BRAND: This is open to all journal publishers, editors, who are interested in moving either a subscription-based or APC gold-based open journal to a diamond model. Diamond is preferable, because it is intended to support both open readership, but also open and equitable authorship. One of the issues with paid open access publishing is it can create a barrier for some authors, depending upon their institution, their region in the world, their own grant funding, the resources at their university.

But we see this as a very high-risk, high-reward program, in that we'll be working with the selected journal editors to devise models for diamond OA publishing that may not exist yet. So it's truly experimental and risky.

KENNEALLY: Amy Brand, people are familiar with gold open access, which is the author-pay model, as you were saying, for article processing charges. There's green open access, which is essentially archived in an open format. Explain just a little bit more about diamond and how that works. If I have it right, it's tied to the institution itself.

BRAND: It definitely can be. In the journal space, the leading diamond model is called Subscribe to Open, and this has worked well for journals that have a solid existing subscriber base, because it's a fairly smooth transition to say to your institutional subscribers, you're going to continue paying what you've been paying to have subscription access to this content, possibly with a small surcharge, possibly not. And if we reach a threshold of commitment, then we commit to opening up the journal. So it's kind of a multi-institute subvention or commitment. It is a form of institutional support. There are other diamond open journals that are completely supported by scientific societies as well, and some that are just supported by their host institutions.

KENNEALLY: Thank you for that clarification. In 2021, MIT Press launched Direct to Open specifically encouraging open access in scholarly monographs. Under the model, university libraries shift from buying digital monographs from the MIT Press once for a single collection to funding them once for the whole world. Again, how does that model work, and why are librarians willing to support it?



BRAND: It's very similar to the Subscribe to Open model in the journal space, but only in the book space. So when we decided that we wanted to try this out for all of our monographs, there was a fairly long path there. We first had to make sure that we had direct control over our provision of digital books, if you will. So we had to have them on our own platform. They couldn't be intermediated. A lot of university presses, for example, deliver all their ebooks through third parties.

So once we established our own ebook platform, we were then able to say, OK, here are digital works that – for example, our trade books or textbooks, where we're not necessarily going to say we can make these open to the world and these are available on a subscription basis. Whereas all of our scholarly monographs – with the opportunity for an author to opt out, of course, though that very rarely happens – if we can get enough institutional commitment, then we will agree to open the next season or year's collection of monographs. This got up to speed very, very quickly.

One of the questions that we often get is what about the free-rider problem? Why would a library want to support this if they know down the road that this content is going to be open anyway? There are certain hedges against that, to your question as to why libraries support it. There is privileged access to backlist scholarly content as well as discounts on our paid book collections. And this has proven to be sustainable and growing.

KENNEALLY: In 2021, MIT Press announced the Grant Program for Diverse Voices to support new work by authors with previously excluded and chronically underrepresented perspectives. The first round of grants to eight authors came this year in February. I had a look at the list. Two very different book projects share a focus on women in science – Leila McNeill's biography of astronomer Henrietta Swan Leavitt, and Jessica Esquivel's very personal story of becoming a particle beam physicist. Can you tell us more?

BRAND: Absolutely. I have long felt very strongly about using my position as the head of a university press to promote diverse perspectives and diverse voices in science, with a special personal interest in women in STEM, and those two books are among a very large collection of books. Henrietta Swan Leavitt was a late 19th century astronomer whose work really enhanced our understanding of the universe. And Esquivel is an Afro-Latina particle physicist, particle physics being a predominantly white male dominated field, and her work focuses on subatomic particles. But in the midst of this very, very successful scientific career, she's extremely outspoken about diversity in STEM. So we're really proud to be publishing both of those works, among many other books that promote marginalized voices and diverse voices in the sciences.

KENNEALLY: Amy Brand, director of the MIT Press, thanks so much for joining me today on the program.



BRAND: My pleasure. Thanks for having me. It's good to see you.

KENNEALLY: That's all for now. Our producer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. You can subscribe to the program wherever you go for podcasts, and please do follow us on Twitter and on Facebook. You can also find Velocity of Content on YouTube as part of the CCC channel. I'm Christopher Kenneally. Thanks for listening.

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