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# Against the Grain<sup>TM</sup>

*"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"*

## AI in Libraries

**Guest Edited by Vessela Ensberg**  
(Associate Director, Data Architecture, UC Davis Library)

**and Peter Brantley**  
(Director, Online Strategy, UC Davis Library)

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## If Rumors Were Horses

**H**appy summer! The first day of summer is here! June in SC is hot, hot, hot, and the beaches are crowded, crowded, crowded. The Charleston area (Folly Beach, Isle of Palms, Sullivans Island, and Kiawah Island!) has been a popular vacation destination for years but it's getting more and more congested. Here's a fun guide to [enjoying your summer in the Lowcountry](#) from the Charleston City Paper. Where do you like to go to visit the beach? Or are you more of a mountain getaway type person? Either way, hope you get a chance to enjoy your favorite places this summer.

We have a lot of Rumors so let's get cracking!



### Conferences and Events

Did you attend the [SSP 2024 Annual Meeting](#)? It was held May 29-31 in the seaport district of Boston. Leah Hinds, our Executive Director, and Don Hawkins, our Conference Blogger, were both there and report strong attendance and high energy and engagement with a strong program. Leah presented alongside Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe (University of Illinois

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# ATG Interviews Peter Potter

## Director of De Gruyter eBound

By **Leah Hinds** (Executive Director, Charleston Hub) <leah@charlestonlibraryconference.com>

and **Tom Gilson** (Associate Editor, *Against the Grain*) <gilson@cofc.edu>

Our editorial team had the chance to catch up with Peter about the [recently announced launch](#) of the University Press Library Open initiative.

**ATG:** *Can you tell us about University Press Library Open (UPLOpen)?*

**PP:** Sure. If I had to distill it down into a few words, I'd say that UPLOpen is an ambitious effort to accelerate open access eBook publishing among university presses. The most visible piece of UPLOpen is our website — [UPLOpen.com](#) — an eBook platform hosted by Ubiquity that offers a curated collection of open access scholarship from university presses with a central focus on achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). When you dig a bit more deeply, though, what I find most exciting about UPLOpen is its potential to serve as a model for sustainable open access monograph publishing. Here's what I mean by that.

UPLOpen builds on the foundation of De Gruyter's [University Press Library \(UPL\)](#), a digital library containing eBook collections from dozens of the world's leading university presses and publishing houses. Libraries that participate in UPL purchase these collections under favorable licensing terms and a streamlined acquisition process. UPLOpen introduces an OA component to the UPL model in a way that takes full advantage of this streamlined process. Until now, OA book programs have largely been "something separate" and different from the core of library collection development. One of the goals of the UPLOpen model is to simplify library support mechanisms for OA publishing by unifying the acquisition of open content with paywalled content. The potential for scalability becomes clear when you consider that UPL has grown to comprise 50+ publishers and over 150 academic libraries.

**ATG:** *How does UPLOpen fit within the open access landscape? How does it differ from other open access book programs, and do you see it as a competitor to initiatives such as OAPEN?*

**PP:** There are, of course, plenty of places on the web where you can go to find open access eBooks, but many of the existing sites include a mixture of open access and paywalled content. All of the books you will find on UPLOpen.com are open access. Moreover, the platform itself — built by Ubiquity — is designed to optimize the benefits of open access. One of the things we are most proud of with UPLOpen is the fact that it is designed to fit into the growing open research infrastructure. Not only is the underlying technology open source, it also incorporates other important components of the open infrastructure including Orcid, CrossRef, DataCite, and Hypothes.is, all of which enhances functionality and user experience. This is very much in keeping with Ubiquity's core commitment to open access and open scholarship in general.



UPLOpen also depends upon collaboration with other key players in the OA landscape. For example, Ubiquity has been working for years now with OPERAS on developing the OPERAS Metrics platform, which collects usage and impact metrics from many different sources and allows for their access, display, and analysis from a single access point. This technology, which we are integrating into UPLOpen, will enhance our ability to provide publishers with consistent book-level metrics.

Similarly, we view collaboration with OAPEN as crucial to the long-term success of UPLOpen. OAPEN, of course, plays an essential role in every aspect of the open access book ecosystem, from dissemination and metrics to quality assurance and digital preservation. This is why Brian Hole and I were eager to meet with Niels Stern and Laura Wilkinson at the London Book Fair in March to discuss ways that UPLOpen can support the work of OAPEN in the future.

The final point I'll make about UPLOpen's place in the open access landscape is that I believe we've created a great experience for users. Our goal from the beginning was to create a welcoming place where people could go to find freely available, authoritative research from many of the world's top university presses without the distractions they find elsewhere on the web. We want visitors to hang out and explore the site as they would in a bookstore or a library. When they find a book they're interested in, they can read it directly on the platform or download it in multiple formats. And if they want to own a print copy, we link directly to the publisher's website or any commerce site the publisher chooses. The focus of UPLOpen is on the presses and, whenever possible, we want to drive traffic back to the presses in the hope that people will explore their sites and buy books that they would otherwise buy from Amazon. In the long run, I'm hoping that UPLOpen, with its growing amount of content, will become a proving ground for the proposition that OA can drive sales.

**ATG:** *What is DeGruyter's relationship to UPLOpen, and how is it related to the University Press Library (UPL)?*

**PP:** As I mentioned above, UPLOpen grew out of De Gruyter's [University Press Library \(UPL\)](#) program, which is a collection-based model for libraries to acquire eBooks from university presses. As the OA counterpart to UPL, UPLOpen provides a single destination for open access books published by UPL-affiliated presses. When a library purchases a UPL collection, a percentage of the total amount is allocated for open access publication, and those funds go not to De Gruyter but to De Gruyter's not-for-profit foundation [eBound](#), where they are then made available to UPL member presses to publish open access books.

In short, eBound is the financial hub of UPLOpen. As a 501 (c) (3) public foundation, it oversees UPLOpen's funding and



coordinates UPLOpen's multiple stakeholders. In addition to funds collected from the sale of UPL collections, eBound will generate additional revenue from other sources (including institutional memberships, one-time donations, and more) that collectively will give participating presses an ongoing, reliable funding stream to grow their OA book programs in years to come.

As the new executive director of eBound, my task is to further develop the UPLOpen business model in consultation with the eBound advisory board, which consists of leading figures in the academic library and scholarly publishing community. Throughout this process and beyond, I'm eager to be as transparent as possible so that we build trust in the community in keeping with our [transparency pledge](#) on the website.

**ATG:** *According to the press release, "At launch, UPLOpen.com proudly hosts more than 350 open access books from over thirty university presses..." That's quite impressive! Can you tell us about this development and how the different university presses became involved?*

**PP:** The majority of the 375 books currently on UPLOpen come from two existing collections of open access books: Luminos and TOME. We started with these two collections for a few reasons. First, the UPLOpen platform has been, until recently, in beta testing, so it made sense to begin with a couple of discrete collections as a way to test the technology.

Luminos was a natural for the site because it was one of the first truly innovative OA books initiatives and it is owned by the University of California Press, which is a UPL press and a Ubiquity partner press. We've also benefited greatly from Erich van Rijn, of UC Press, who has generously offered feedback as we've been developing UPLOpen.

The reasons for including TOME were a bit different. Before moving to De Gruyter in 2023, I had direct experience working with TOME and its sponsoring organizations (AAU, ARL, AUPresses), so I was deeply familiar with the initiative. And although the pilot ended in 2022, dozens of funded books were still to be published with no guarantee that they would all find their way into a single collection where they could be discoverable as TOME books. So, we made a commitment to include the complete collection in UPLOpen, many of which are published by presses that are not part of UPL, which explains the presence on the site of books by non-UPL presses. The total number of TOME titles currently in UPLOpen stands at 185. We'll add the remaining titles (probably 20-30 more) as they are published, until the collection is complete. In addition, we will make sure that all of the titles are added to OAPEN as well.

**ATG:** *One of the unique aspects of this initiative is the focus on incorporating the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. How are the SDG's incorporated into the book catalog? How are the badges assigned to show SDG alignment?*

**PP:** We're excited about the integration of the UN Sustainable Development Goals into the platform because of the invaluable role that academic publishers can play in facilitating implementation of the SDG objectives through both institutional practices and the works they publish. The way we've featured this on the website is to assign badges to books based upon the SDGs that they address. For instance, on the website you'll find a book entitled [Advancing Equality](#) published by the University of California Press, and you'll see that we've assigned 4 badges to the book corresponding with 4 specific SDGs. We used AI to identify the relevant SDGs, and the Ubiquity team developed the badge feature to highlight them. I should add that we will

continue to refine our use of AI over time, iteratively, based upon feedback we receive from authors, readers, and the research community.

I also want to point out that the newest book added to UPLOpen is [Redefining Development](#), written by Paula Caballero and Patti Londoño, two key players in the development and adoption of the SDGs. The book, published by Lynne Rienner Publishers in 2022, was just flipped to OA with funding from eBound. It is a natural for UPLOpen given the authors' intention in writing the book: to incentivize innovation and boldness in how the SDGs are implemented.

**ATG:** *Also from the press release, "By mid-2024, the number of titles hosted on UPLOpen.com is expected to exceed 2,500, with further plans for significant growth already in motion for 2025 and beyond." Can you talk to us about your roadmap for the future? What are your next steps and plans for expansion?*

**PP:** We have an ambitious development plan for UPLOpen, which we've sketched out on the website. I will just say here that our goal is to continue to improve the platform, adding both content and functionality over time. We will do this in consultation with stakeholders from across the scholarly publishing community.

With respect to content, our next step is to add more books to the site including over 2,000 OA titles currently on De Gruyter.com. Next year, as we generate revenue for UPL presses, we will begin adding their born-OA books to the site. Meanwhile, over the next several years we will be looking for opportunities to add more OA books from presses outside of UPL. Our long-range goal is to have 10,000 OA books on UPLOpen by 2025.

With respect to functionality, one particular area of priority for us is to improve search capability, which is rather basic at the moment. We'll be adding an advanced search function that will enable users to search based on subject matter, genre, author, publisher, etc. Over time, we have plans to incorporate AI-powered semantic search algorithms, which will improve the ability of the search function to "understand" context and meaning behind user queries. We also look forward to experimenting with AI to verify and improve alignment of eBook content with UN SDGs and to enhance accessibility features for users with disabilities. Other items on the roadmap include the addition of MARC and Kbart records for download by title and by batch, title lists for download, further development of the [OPERAS](#) Metrics platform to improve book-level usage metrics, and the integration of a news/social media feed.

**ATG:** *Peter, thank you very much for talking with us and our ATG readers! We'll be sure to keep an eye on [uplopen.com](#) for updates.* 🌳

**Peter Potter** is Vice President at Paradigm Publishing Services and Executive Director of De Gruyter eBound. His previous roles included senior publishing positions at Virginia Tech, Cornell, Penn State, and Wesleyan. During his time at Virginia Tech, Peter served as a Visiting Program Officer for TOME (Toward an Open Access Monograph Ecosystem), a 5-year pilot project of the Association of American Universities (AAU), the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), and the Association of University Presses (AUPresses). 🌳