A business model for author-pays publishing

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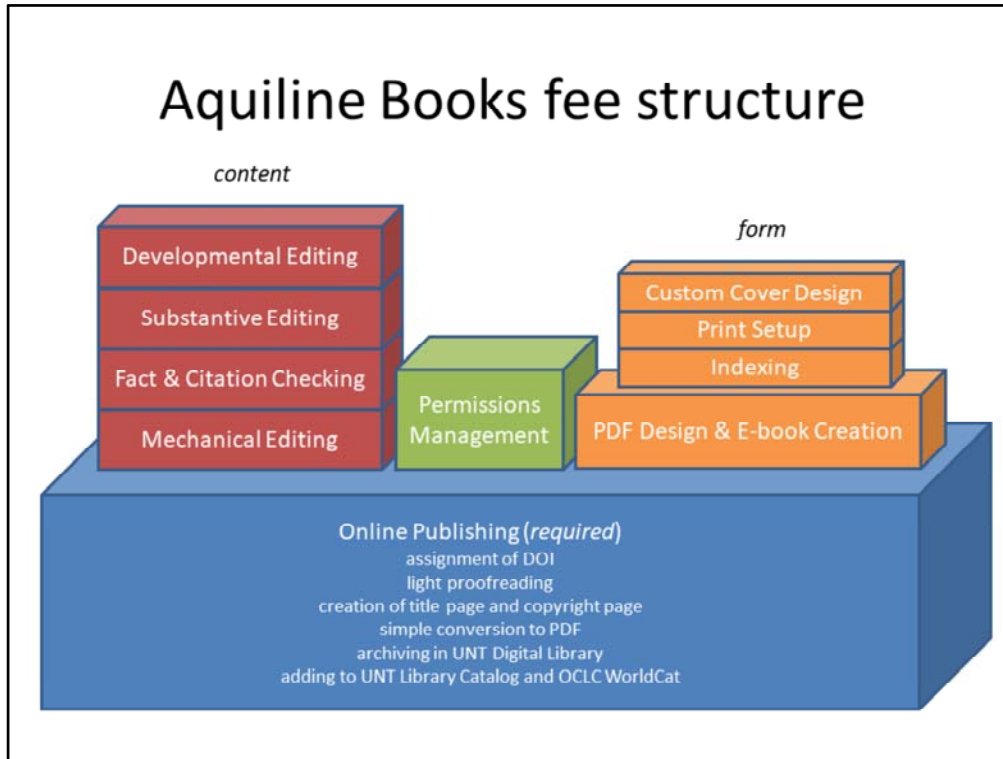University of North Texas
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My appointment is in the Libraries at UNT, where I head the Scholarly Communication Office, whose staff offers services to help students and faculty understand and adapt to the changes that are happening in the ways that researchers are communicating with each other. One of these is out library publishing service, which is called Aquiline Books. I know this is the journals assembly, but I was asked to speak today about the business model for this imprint for books.

Publishing models

University press	Aquiline Books
reader pays	author pays
specialization in certain disciplines	any discipline
publish authors regardless of affiliation	publish only authors at UNT
conduct peer review	author's affiliation with UNT is their credential for publishing
standard set of editing, design, and dissemination services designed to maintain publisher's reputation	author chooses what type of editing, design, and dissemination they want as long as they make a version free to read online

The cost to publish varies by project according to a menu of fees, which can be paid using research funds, grants, or other sources of funding.

Aquiline Books fee structure

content / *form*

Developmental Editing
Substantive Editing
Fact & Citation Checking
Mechanical Editing

Permissions Management

Custom Cover Design
Print Setup
Indexing
PDF Design & E-book Creation

Online Publishing (*required*)
assignment of DOI
light proofreading
creation of title page and copyright page
simple conversion to PDF
archiving in UNT Digital Library
adding to UNT Library Catalog and OCLC WorldCat

Here's a diagram designed to make the menu of fees easier to understand. You can also find this on the Aquiline Books website.

There's a minimal fee (the blue box) to make the work free to read online, and there are various add-on fees for additional services. Most of the services are carried about by freelancers and vendors that have joined my roster.

How much do each of these services cost? It varies, but I provide a "cost estimator" spreadsheet on the website that potential authors can download to fill out to derive an estimate. We can't know the exact cost in advance anyway because I ask freelancers and vendors to bid on any given project, and their exact price varies because every book is different.

I charge authors what the freelancers charge me, without any overhead meant to cover my salary or other indirect costs, which would be difficult to calculate given that I have other job duties besides running this service. So even though I don't end up charging authors the full, true cost of publishing, I hope to make them more aware of some of the actual costs involved in publishing, and of how the costs vary depending on the amount of effort involved in creating the product.

The cost estimator

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	UNT Libraries Scholarly Publishing Services						
2	Aquiline Books cost estimator						
3	This spreadsheet will help you estimate the cost to publish a book with Aquiline Books. Exact costs will vary by project.	You update cells with this background color with data about your work.					
4							
5	Number of words in your work	71,656					
6	If you want your published work to contain complex formatting, such as sidebars, where exact placement on the page is important, type "y" in the cell to the right. Footnotes don't count as "complex".	n					
7							
8	Fee	Choice (type "y" if you want this service)	Cost to you				
9	Online Publishing	(required)	$ -	Fee assessed only if no form of editing chosen.			
10	Developmental Editing	y	$ 1,361.46				
11	Substantive Editing	y	$ 1,576.43				
12	Fact & Citation Verification	y	$ 788.22				
13	Mechanical Editing	y	$ 931.53				
14	Permissions Management	y	$ 1,074.84				
15	PDF Design & E-book Creation	y	$ 71.66				
16	Indexing	y	$ 716.56				
17	Print Setup	y	$ 125.00	Only choose "y" if Libraries will arrange printing.			
18	Custom Cover Design	y	$ 431.17				
19							
20		Total	$ 7,076.86				

My cost estimator comes pre-filled out with a word count of about 70,000 words, which I took as a starting point, but you can update this. There are yes/no questions that you update based on your book. Right now you've opted into all of the services, which is pretty much implausible. It might make more sense to set all of them to "no" initially.

The calculations for the cost of each service are based on average rates for these different services provided to me by freelancers and vendors that have joined my roster. When I have a particular project, I work with the author to determine which services they are interested in getting quotes on for their project in particular. I invite any freelancers and vendors on my roster that provided an average rate for those services to bid on them. I realize that no two manuscripts are the same, so actual quotes won't necessarily correspond to average rates provided when joining the roster.

There are some known deficiencies in this cost estimator that I haven't yet taken the time to fix. The big one is with the question in row six of the spreadsheet: about complex formatting. If you choose "no" here (as shown), the cost for PDF Design & E-book Creation is incredibly low. This was based on some average rates provided by vendors providing automated or quasi-automated composition based on XML workflows. Their bids on specific projects have turned out to be much higher than in their original average rates.

I'll be happy to discuss this cost estimator during the mini workshops to follow, but my main plan for that time is to walk through an operating budget for Aquiline Books to show you how this unconventional model for publishing fits into the typical way of thinking about

a press budget. I think this will give us an opportunity to talk a bit about how to decide, in accounting, which expenses should be considered directly attributable to a particular project (direct costs) and which can't be (indirect costs).