An Appeal on Behalf of the SMU Press  
Submitted by Russell Martin, chair, SMU Press Advisory Board

We, the members of the advisory board of the SMU Press (Tom Mayo, Paul Rogers, David Haynes, Ed Countryman, Russell Martin) were informed on Tuesday, April 27, 2010, in a meeting with Provost Paul Ludden and Associate Provost Ellen Jackofsky, that the SMU Press, the oldest university press in the state of Texas, will be shut down, effective June 1, 2010. In a separate meeting two days later, on April 29, the Provost and Associate Provost met alone with the three members of the staff of the SMU Press (Keith Gregory, Kathryn Lang, and George Ann Ratchford), during which meeting they were told that the SMU Press was being shut down and their positions eliminated.

Before this time, neither the advisory board nor the staff of the Press had any communication from the Provost’s office about the precarious condition of the Press. Indeed, before this sudden announcement, the Press was going about its customary business—publishing outstanding works of scholarship and literary fiction. On Friday evening, April 23, as part of the SMU Literary Festival, the Press hosted a reception for Tracy Daugherty and his new book of short stories, *One Day the Wind Changed* (Dallas: SMU Press, 2010). On Tuesday evening, April 27, the SMU Press (with the Clements Center, the Friends of the Library, and the DeGolyer Library) hosted a lecture by David Weber and Jane Elder, who discussed their new book, *Fiasco: George Clinton Gardner’s Correspondence from the U.S.-Mexico Boundary Survey, 1849-1854* (Dallas: SMU Press, 2010). Both books, it seems, could not have been more aptly titled: the wind has changed, and we have reaped a fiasco.

While economic hard times are undeniably with us, and budgets across campus are tight, we also think that the SMU Press is one of the best things that the university has done in its history (2012 will be the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Press), due in large part to the editorial efforts of the staff, especially in the field of literary fiction, where the Press has a national reputation for excellence. Of the 111 fiction titles the Press has published, over one-third have been reviewed in the *New York Times Book Review*, a prodigious achievement and indication of high quality; few other areas of the university are so visible on the national stage. If indeed the Press has come to the end of its life (and such a conclusion may be inevitable, given the harsh realities facing the publishing industry more broadly), we believe that a judgment so important to the reputation of the university should be made after careful deliberation among all those concerned (advisory board members, staff members, faculty members, and administrators) and should not be made summarily without advance consultation with all those concerned.

We were told that there is no money available for the Press. True, the Press does not make money. But is it the mission of SMU to make money? We believe it is SMU’s mission to promote teaching and research, two activities which the SMU Press, directly and indirectly, supports with great success. In fact, one could argue that the annual subsidy which allows the SMU Press to exist not only brings into being 8-12 new books each year but also spreads the good name of Southern Methodist University across the country and the world. From this standpoint, the Press is a public relations bargain. For the same amount of money, we doubt one could buy such advertising and exposure in the *New York Times* and other influential newspapers and journals. To paraphrase Daniel Webster, It is a small press, but there are those who love it.
Sentiment alone will not carry the day; we are not blind to economic realities. It may be that, after open and honest debate and reflection, we may all come to the same conclusion: the SMU Press should be shut down. If we do so, at the least we’ll know that all options were considered and that all consequences were weighed. We’d also be able to uphold our commitments (legal and moral) to authors whose manuscripts are in various stages of completion, some in fact just issued from the Press this spring and some ready to be published this fall. We’ll also give loyal and dedicated staff members of the Press time to consider their own futures. (Keith Gregory has served for 24 years; Kathie Lang for 18, George Ann Ratchford for 9: they deserve better than 30 days’ notice.)

In the process of this analysis, however, we might also discover a workable way forward for the Press, so that it could be reshaped and renewed in ways that build upon its strengths, enhance its balance sheet, and serve the larger aspirations of the university in our oft-stated strategic goal of achieving national distinction. Given SMU’s pockets of excellence in a variety of disciplines (the humanities, the arts, law, business, engineering, and theology), might not this be the time for a rejuvenated Press to seek manuscripts and publish scholarship in new areas, taking advantage of faculty expertise? Perhaps. But we’ll never know the answer to that question if the Press ceases to exist in 30 days.

We therefore ask the Faculty Senate to support the advisory board in our efforts to put in place a one-year transition period for the Press, from June 1, 2010, to May 31, 2011. During this time, obligations to authors and their manuscripts can be met fairly and honorably; staff members will retain their current positions and will have time to plan for their own futures (whether retirement or other employment); and all of us (board members, staff members, faculty, and administrators) will have time to perform a thorough self-study of the Press and its role in the life of SMU and the broader world of scholarship and culture.

Therefore, be it resolved, that the SMU Faculty Senate supports a motion to keep the SMU Press and its staff in place from June 1, 2010, to May 31, 2011, allowing all interested parties to determine, during this time of careful reflection and planning, the future role of the SMU Press.

Appended to this appeal are several documents, some lengthy, which we feel help give some idea of the nature and scope of the Press and its operations. [Not all of these documents were available for AAUP to post.]

Honors & Awards for SMU Press authors
SMU Authors Go on to Commercial Success
SMU Press Fiction Titles Reviewed in the NYTimes Book Review
SMU Press: Books in Print (summary)
SMU Press: Books in Print (detailed, with illustrations)
Summary Remarks for a Publishing Panel at UNT, prepared by editor Kathryn Lang
Friends of the SMU Press (outside readers, prominent literary figures)
Of our 82 *original* fiction titles (not counting reprints) in print, 31 of them have been reviewed in the *New York Times Book Review*.

And two more interesting tidbits:

*Of those 31 SMU Press fiction titles that were reviewed in the NYTBR, 20 were collections; 11 were novels.*

*Of our 82 original fiction titles in print, 49 are collections; 33 are novels.*

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**Honors/Awards for SMU Press authors:**

*Marshall Terry’s *Dallas Stories* (1987) won for him the Barbara McCombs/Lon Tinkle Award of the Texas Institute of Letters for “sustained excellence in letters; it won the 1988 Dedman College University Lecture Series Authors’ Award.*

*If I Had Wheels or Love: Collected Poems of Vassar Miller* (1991) won the 1993 Lon Tinkle Memorial Award for Continuing Excellence in Texas Letters awarded by the Texas Institute of Letters. Ms. Miller was inducted into the Texas Women’s Hall of Fame (1996-97).


* Deb Navas’s *Things We Lost, Gave Away, Bought High and Sold Low* (1992) won the New Hampshire Writers and Publishers Project’s Outstanding Emerging Writer Award (1994).

* Lee Byrd’s *My Sister Disappears* (1993) won the Texas Institute of Letters’ Steven Turner Award for best first book of fiction and a Southwest Book Award by Border Regional Library Association. One of the stories, “Major Six Pockets” was featured in the Texas Bound Literary Series; it had previously won the Texas Institute of Letters award for best short fiction and was included in the 1993 edition of *New Stories From the South.*

* Janet Peery’s story collection *Alligator Dance* (1993) won a 1993 Whiting Award — a $30,000 cash prize and a Rosenthal Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters ($5,000). Peery’s second book, *The River Beyond the World* (published by St. Martin’s Press, 1996), which is an expansion of “Nosotros,” one of the stories in *Alligator Dance,* was one of 5 finalists for the National Book Award in 1996.

* Anthony Bukoski’s *Children of Strangers* (1993) won the Oskar Halecki Prize from the Polish American Historical Association and the 1994 Outstanding Achievement Award from the Wisconsin Library Association. Several of the stories were read on the air as part of the Wisconsin area’s NPR literary readings series. In 1997 he was featured in the PBS video “A Sense of Place: A Portrait of Three Midwestern Writers.”

*Don Watt’s* collection *Can You Get There From Here?* won the Texas Institute of Letters’ Steven Turner Award for the best first book of fiction (1994).

* The Jane Elder/David Weber title *Trading in Santa Fe: John M. Kingsbury’s Correspondence with James Josiah Webb, 1853-1861* won a 1996 Choice Award. It also won a Southwest Book Award from the Border Regional Library Association and the Fray Francisco Atanasio Dominguez Award for Historical Surveys and Research from the Historical Society of New Mexico (in 1998).

*The rights to Nancy Andrews and Cary Henderson’s *Partial View: An Alzheimer’s Journal* were sold to an Italian publisher. This book was featured as # 1 on *ForeWord* Magazine’s list of Big Ten titles published by university presses in 1998 and won that year’s gold (lst) prize in the Book of the Year Awards Health category. It was featured in an exhibit at National Alzheimer’s Day in 1998 at the Newseum in Arlington, Virginia.

*Edra Ziesk’s debut novel *Acceptable Losses* won the 1998 Books for the Teen Age Award from the New York Public Library.

*Tracy Daugherty’s novel *The Bay Orator* (1998) was a finalist for the Oregon Book Award. He won a 1998 National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowship.


*Alan Cheuse was featured in a half page interview in *Publishers Weekly* to accompany a review of his new collection *Lost and Old Rivers* (1998).

*The rights to Dale Moffitt’s *Between Two Silences: Talking with Peter Brook* (1999) were sold to British, French, German, and Greek publishers. The book was a selection of the Stage & Screen Book Club.

*John Mort’s *Soldier in Paradise* (1999), his first novel, won the American Library Association’s bill boyd Library Literature Award honoring the best fiction set in a period when the U.S. was at war. It was also chosen as an audio book by Books in Motion.

*Annette Sanford’s story “Trip in a Summer Dress” from her 1999 collection, *Crossing Shattuck Bridge,* was adapted for a short film produced by Janine Turner.

* Dan Stern’s *One Day's Perfect Weather* (1999) was one of 4 fiction finalists for the 2001 Koret Jewish Book Awards and was reviewed in both the daily *New York Times* and in the *New York Times Book Review*. He was the subject of a full-length feature interview in *Publishers Weekly*. His *In the Country of the Young* has received 2 citations from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

* Stories in Ellen Winter’s debut collection *The Price You Pay* won the 1999 Longan Award for Southwestern Woman Writers and won her a creative writing fellowship from the Arizona Commission on the Arts for 1999-2000. Her book also won her a 2001 Bread Loaf fellowship.
*Liza Wieland’s (2001) novel Bombshell was a BOMC alternate selection, a Foreword finalist for the literary fiction award, and won the Fred Whitehead Award from the TIL for trade book design (Tom Dawson, designer).

*Marty Jurow’s Seein’ Stars: Show Biz Odyssey (2001) was a Stage & Screen Book Club Selection.

*Scott Blackwood’s debut collection In the Shadow of Our House (2001) won the Austin Writers League’s Violet Crown Award, a Dobie Paisano fellowship and 2 TX Commission on the Arts fellowships; 2 of the stories were Pushcart nominees. The book received a half page review in the New York Times.

*Miriam Levine’s 2002 novel In Paterson won the Paterson Prize and was a Reading Group Choice.

* Tracy Daugherty won the 2001 Brazos Short Fiction Prize for Best Short Story for “Comfort Me With Apples,” one of the stories in It Takes A Worried Man, (Spring 2002). This collection won the 2003 Oregon Book Award.


*Tony Bukoski won the first annual Sarmatian Review Literary Prize in 2002, awarded for the body of his work by the Polish Institute of Houston. He also won a 2002 R.V. Cassill Fellowship in Fiction awarded by the Christopher Isherwood Foundation.


*Iqbal Pittalwala won (in 2002) the First Annual Short Story Award from the Gival Press for one of the stories in his debut collection Dear Paramount Pictures (2002).

*Tony Bukoski’s collection Time Between Trains (2003) won the Anne Powers Book Length Fiction Award from the Council of Wisconsin Writers. He was awarded a Robert E. Garde Wisconsin Idea Foundation Award for Excellence, and an Outstanding Achievement Award from the Wisconsin Library Association. He was featured in the PBS video “A Sense of Place”; the title story was read in live performance in New York in the “Selected Shorts” series, later broadcast on NPR.

*Tracy Daugherty’s novel Axeman’s Jazz (2003) won the 2004 Oregon Book Award.


*Richard Flint and Shirley Cushing Flint’s (2005) work, Documents of the Coronado Expedition, 1539-1542: “They Were Not Familiar with his Majesty, nor Did They Wish to Be His Subjects, won the Fray Francisco Atanasio Dominguez Award for Historic Surveys and Research from the Historical Society of
New Mexico; it was named An Outstanding Academic Title for 2005 from Choice, was a top selection for “Best Reading in 2005."

*Dorothy Wall’s *Encounters with the Invisible: Unseen Illness, Controversy, and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome* (2005) won the 2007 Sand Castles Author & Book of the Year Award (from the Patient Alliance for Neuroendocrineimmune Disorders Organization for Research and Advocacy).


*Mike McNally’s* 2007 collection, *The Gateway*, was one of five finalists for the PEN/Faulkner Award.

*Ellen Buie Niewyk’s* *Jerry Bywaters-Lone Star Printmaker* (2007) won the 2008 CASETA Publication Award. It was featured in “Postcards” in *Texas Highways* magazine and in *The Magazine Antiques*.


*David McGlynn’s* 2008 collection, *The End of the Straight and Narrow*, won the 2008 Utah Book Award. It was also a *Foreword* magazine Book of the Year finalist, finalist for the Texas Institute of Letters’ Best First Book of Fiction Award, and recipient of an Award for Outstanding Achievement by the Wisconsin Library Association.

*Ellen Buie Niewyk’s* *Jerry Bywaters-Lone Star Printmaker* (2007) won the 2008 CASETA Publication Award. It was featured in “Postcards” in *Texas Highways* magazine and in *The Magazine Antiques*.


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*Tony Bukoski’s* 2008 collection, *North of the Port*, won the Anne Powers Book Length Fiction Award from the Council of Wisconsin Writers (Wisconsin Book Award), an Outstanding Achievement recognition for a 2008 publication by the Wisconsin Library Association Literary Awards Committee, and the Polish American Historical Association’s Creative Arts Award.

*Edra Ziesk’s* 2008 novel, *The Trespasser*, was reviewed in *Southern Living* and was a *ForeWord* magazine Book of the Year finalist.

*Tracy Winn’s* 2009 collection *Mrs. Somebody Somebody* was reviewed (in brief) in *People* magazine, and the paperback rights to the book were bought by Random House for $50,000. The stories won her an Arch and Bruce Brown Foundation Grant, a 2008 Fiction Fellowship from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a Barbara Deming Memorial Trust Grant, Pushcart nominations, and a Lambda Award for the title story.

*Warren Corbett’s* 2009 biography of Paul Richards (*The Wizard of Waxahachie: Paul Richards and the End of Baseball as We Knew It*) was one of 10 finalists for the Casey Award for the Most Outstanding Baseball Book of the Year, and a Finalist for the 2009 Seymour Medal.

*Darwin Payne’s* *Quest for Justice: Louis A. Bedford and the Struggle for Equal Rights in Texas* (2009) has the distinction of being the only SMU Press book ever to be featured on a McDonald’s paper placemat in honor of Black History month.