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news
Association of College & Research Libraries


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# Features

# Departments




This month's cover features the 1995 watercolor "Giraffes VIII" by Viktor Schreckengost (1906–2008). While Schreckengost was primarily known for his work with ceramics, sculpture, and industrial design, he was also a prolific watercolor painter. The image of a mother and baby giraffe is one of his many watercolors featuring adult animals and their young.

Along with his sketches and papers, the Viktor Schreckengost Collection held by the Cleveland State University (CSU) Special Collections includes digitized images of his paintings in a variety of styles, including scenes from his many travels, as well as his interest in architecture, cityscapes, rural scenes, musical instruments, Mexican folk art, and animals. A selection of Schreckengost's work and other collections held by CSU and partnering institutions can be found at https://www.clevelandmemory.org/schreckengost/.

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**Editorial offices:** (312) 280-2513

**Email:** dfree@ala.org

**Website:** crln.acrl.org

**Product advertising:** Contact Pam Marino, ACRL Advertising, c/o Choice, 575 Main Street, Suite 300, Middletown, CT 06457; (860) 347-1387.

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**Back issues:** $11.00 each.

## Michelle Demeter Appointed *College & Research Libraries* Editor

ACRL announces the appointment of Michelle Demeter, head of instruction and undergraduate services at New York University, to the post of editor for *College & Research Libraries* (*C&RL*). Demeter will serve as editor-designate for the journal beginning July 1, 2024, and begin an initial three-year term as editor on July 1, 2025.

"The ACRL Board of Directors is thrilled to name Michelle Demeter as the next editor of *C&RL*," said ACRL President Beth McNeil of Purdue University. "Her experience and familiarity with the ACRL publication program, knowledge of editorial processes and the scholarly communication landscape, vision for the journal, and strong commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion make her the ideal candidate to lead *C&RL*. We look forward to this next chapter for the journal and thank outgoing editor Kristen Totleben for her service to ACRL and the profession."

"I am honored to lead *C&RL* and steward the scholarship reflecting academic librarianship today," Demeter said. "I look forward to working with the editorial board as we seek opportunities to expand *C&RL*'s impact."

In the position of editor, Demeter will also serve as chair of the *C&RL* Editorial Board and as a member of the ACRL Publications Coordinating Committee. She succeeds Kristen Totleben, open publishing librarian at the University of Rochester, as *C&RL* editor. Totleben will work closely with Demeter over the next year to ensure a smooth transition.

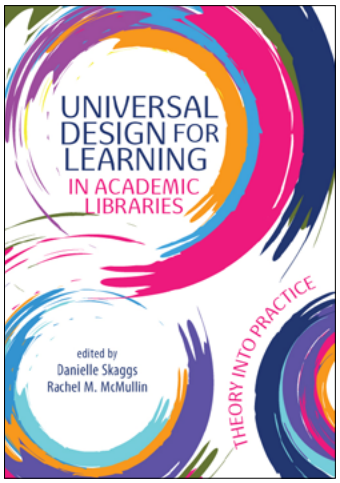
As part of her record of publishing, editing, and reviewing scholarly writing, Demeter has served as a *C&RL* reviewer, *C&RL* Editorial Board member since 2019, and as a *Library Leadership & Management* (*LL&M*) Editorial Board member (2011–2017, 2021–2023) and a reviewer from 2011 to 2023.

## FSU Expands Peer Tutoring in Strozier Library

Florida State University (FSU) students will have more opportunities to take advantage of high-quality tutoring for some of their most challenging courses, thanks to a gift that boosts resources for these services to meet students where they are. With a gift from the Fogg Charitable Trust, the Academic Center for Excellence (ACE), which serves as FSU's center for tutoring and study skills resources, will expand its operations to Strozier Library. The library already offers tutors for students, but the gift will increase availability and allow ACE to offer its services as the university experts in tutoring. ACE tutoring is led by peer tutors—undergraduates who have already succeeded in the courses and are chosen for their knowledge and ability to explain complicated subject matter.

The Fogg Charitable Trust is active in the Southeast and is dedicated to supporting efforts and communities that the late Ed and Lisbeth Fogg contributed to. The Foggs were the developers and managers of Farm Stores, a convenience store that specializes in its own brand of milk, bread, and ice cream, and created multiple other business and philanthropic ventures. For more information, visit https://ace.fsu.edu/.

## New from ACRL—Universal Design for Learning in Academic Libraries: Theory into Practice




ACRL announces the publication of *Universal Design for Learning in Academic Libraries: Theory into Practice*, edited by Danielle Skaggs and Rachel M. McMullin. It includes lesson plans and strategies for the wide range of instructional activities that occur in academic libraries, including in-person, online, synchronous, asynchronous, and research help, as well as different types of academic library work such as access services and leadership.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an educational framework for improving and optimizing teaching and learning. It's focused on intentionally designing for the needs and abilities of all learners—putting accessibility into the planning stages instead of as an accommodation after the fact—and providing flexibility in the ways students access and engage with materials and learning objectives.

*Universal Design for Learning in Academic Libraries* explores UDL in four parts.

- Theory and Background
- In Instruction and Reference
- Behind the Scenes
- Beyond the Library

Chapters include looks at UDL and US law and policy; working with student disability services to create accessible research services; UDL and the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education and the Reference and User Services Association's Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers; making open educational resources equitable and accessible; and much more.

*Universal Design for Learning in Academic Libraries* can make learning about UDL and implementing it into your work quicker and easier and provides ways to become an advocate for UDL inside your library and across campus.

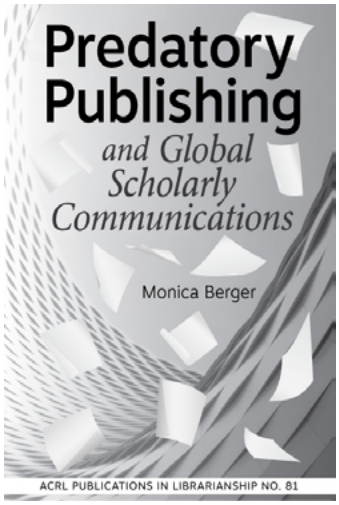
*Universal Design for Learning in Academic Libraries: Theory into Practice* is available for purchase in print and as an ebook through the ALA Online Store; in print through Amazon.com; and by telephone order at (866) 746-7252 in the United States. or (770) 442-8633 for international customers.

## UNC-Chapel Hill Library Develops All-Digital Watergate Exhibit

The University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (UNC-Chapel Hill) University Libraries launched a digital-only exhibition, "A Southern View of Watergate: Tar Heels' Impact on a Nationwide Scandal," on March 1, 2024. On that day 50 years ago, a grand jury indicted seven aides and advisers to then-President Richard Nixon and named the president as an unindicted co-conspirator. The exhibit spotlights key documents that all came to be housed in the Southern Historical Collection at UNC-Chapel Hill's Wilson Library: two Nixon subpoenas, Nixon's written refusal to comply and a copy of the president's infamous "enemies list." Over the years, UNC-Chapel Hill acquired several "national treasures" related

to the scandal. They were among the papers donated by Tar Heels who were also key Watergate investigation figures, Sen. Sam Ervin '17, chair of the Watergate Committee, and Rufus Edmisten '63, Ervin's deputy chief counsel. The archive also includes the personal diary of the hearings and other papers from journalist and author Jim Reston '63, whose book "The Conviction of Richard Nixon" was the basis of the play and movie "Frost/Nixon." The exhibit is available at https://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/exhibits/show/watergate/introduction.

## ACRL Releases Predatory Publishing and Global Scholarly Communications




ACRL announces the publication of *Predatory Publishing and Global Scholarly Communications*, book number 81 in the Publications in Librarianship series, by Monica Berger. This thorough book provides tools for understanding and teaching the impact of predatory publishing and contributing to its mitigation in the context of advocating for a more balanced, sustainable, and humane scholarly communications ecosystem.

Predatory publishing is a complex problem that harms a broad array of stakeholders and concerns across the scholarly communications system. It shines a light on the inadequacies of scholarly assessment and related rewards systems, contributes to the marginalization of scholarship from less developed countries, and negatively impacts the acceptance of open access.

To fix what is broken in scholarly communications, academic librarians must act as both teachers and advocates and partner with other stakeholders who have the agency to change how scholarship is produced, assessed, and rewarded. *Predatory Publishing and Global Scholarly Communications* is a unique and comprehensive exploration of predatory publishing in four parts.

- Background
- Characteristics and Research
- The Geopolitics of Scholarly Publishing
- Responses and Solutions

It examines the history of predatory publishing and basics of scholarly assessment; identifies types of research misconduct and unethical scholarly behaviors; provides critical context to predatory publishing and scholarly communications beyond the Global North; and offers structural and pedagogical solutions and teaching materials for librarians to use in their work with authors, students, faculty, and other stakeholders.

*Predatory Publishing and Global Scholarly Communications* gives powerful insight into predatory publishing worldwide, inside and outside of the library community, and provides methods for understanding and teaching its impact and contributing to its improvement.

*Predatory Publishing and Global Scholarly Communications* is available for purchase in print and as an ebook through the ALA Online Store; in print through Amazon.com; and by telephone order at (866) 746-7252 in the United States or (770) 442-8633 for international customers.

## Florida Virtual Campus Joins Path to Open

Florida Virtual Campus (FLVC), a centralized service supporting the shared needs of Florida's 40 public colleges and universities, has joined Path to Open, a pilot program to support the open access publication of new groundbreaking scholarly books that will bring diverse perspectives and research to millions of people. Path to Open launched in 2023 as a collaboration among JSTOR, a nonprofit service of ITHAKA, The University of Michigan Press, the University of North Carolina Press, and the American Council of Learned Societies. The program now has the support of nearly 150 libraries around the world, and 42 presses. FLVC marks Path to Open's largest library consortia commitment to date with funding for the full 2024–2026 pilot period. This agreement gives all 2 and 4-year public colleges and universities in Florida access to Path to Open books as they are published and helps to ensure that more than 1,000 new books from university presses and their authors will be published through this new sustainable open access model. Learn more about Path to Open at https://about.jstor.org/path-to-open/.

## Tech Bits . . .

### Brought to you by the ACRL ULS Technology in University Libraries Committee

RSS is dead, long live RSS! Many of you may be familiar with the popularity and subsequent demise of Google Reader. While many considered it the end of RSS feeds, they continue to exist and are very helpful in serving up real-time updates from a variety of information sources. These feeds can come from websites and blogs, YouTube videos, podcasts, or serve up continuous matches for saved search results. There continue to be helpful RSS aggregators like Feedly, Feedbin, and Inoreader to just name a few. These platforms are good to help you organize and discover feeds, or help you build your own! Why continue bookmarking and visiting multiple sites to look for updates, when RSS feeds bring all the timely updates to you?

*—Roger Zender*
*Case Western Reserve University*

## Project Muse Adds Hosted Journal Titles

Five new additions to Project MUSE's hosted journals program are now live on the platform. The new titles are *American Benedictine Review* (American Benedictine Review), *Freedom Schools: A Journal of Democracy and Community* (University of Texas Press), *Getty Research Journal* (Getty Publications), *Korean Journal of Communication* (University of Texas Press), and *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* (Montana Historical Society Press).

Current issues are available for *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, *Freedom Schools, Korean Journal of Communication*, and *American Benedictine Review*. All eighteen back volumes of *Getty Research Journal* are available, and beginning with the forthcoming spring 2024 issue, the journal will be open access. Titles in the hosted program are not included in MUSE's curated journal collections. Learn more at https://muse.jhu.edu/.

Kristina Clement, Chelsee Dickson, and Karen Doster-Greenleaf

# Inclusive Hiring Should Be Standard in My Library

## So Why Isn't It and What Can We Do About It?

Inclusive hiring practices should be standard in academic libraries. Some libraries do it incredibly well, and others—not so much. Currently, Kennesaw State University (KSU) Library System falls closer to the "not so much" category. Some years ago, the KSU Library System had system-wide guidance, support, and documentation for search procedures, but in recent years, hiring practices became siloed into departments and units. Of late, there was very little cross-departmental or cross-unit discussion about how each search chair ran their committees, which led to vastly different candidate experiences throughout the search process. To reunite and standardize our search practices, we developed the KSU Libraries Recruitment and Retention Task Force. The purpose of this task force is to develop a candidate-focused approach to talent recruitment and establish employee-focused, consistent onboarding practices through efforts that demonstrate empathy throughout the application, hiring, and orientation processes.

As we investigated the literature to inform the creation of the task force, we realized we are not alone in our missteps, nor are we alone in trying to rectify the situation.[1] A prominent issue is the subjective nature of seeking the "best fit." While this should pertain to a candidate's competence and suitability for the role, it often hinges on subjective feelings of the hiring entities. This subjectivity is exacerbated by the recognition that hiring extends beyond task completion to incorporating a new presence into our library's ecosystem. The term "fit" is contentious. It's ambiguous yet integral, posing questions about its definition, quantification, and relevance in hiring. Kathryn Houk and Jordan Nielsen's 2023 survey underscored this ambiguity, revealing a widespread lack of clarity about the qualities sought and their evaluation metrics.[2] Sojourna Cunningham, Samantha Guss, and Jennifer Stout took it a step further with their research on library directors who were asked about recruiting for diversity, specifically asking the directors to address the concept of fit. Highlighting the use of terms such as "collegial," "confident," and "friendly" or phrases like "hitting it off" to define fit, these findings showed that "fit"' in hiring is often "undefinable, intangible, and thus allows for libraries to stay within their comfort zones and replicate the status quo."[3] This ambiguity can perpetuate comfort zones and the status quo, undermining diversity and inclusivity in hiring processes.

This article will share the perspectives from three KSU librarians who had recent experiences with search committees that led to the formation of the task force.

Kristina Clement is outreach librarian at Kennesaw State University, email: kcleme19@kennesaw.edu. Chelsee Dickson is scholarly communications librarian at Kennesaw State University, email: cdickso5@kennesaw.edu. Karen Doster-Greenleaf is director of research and instructional services at Kennesaw State University, email: kdosterg@kennesaw.edu.

## Kristina Clement, Outreach Librarian

In the fall of 2022, I co-chaired a faculty search with my colleague, Chelsee Dickson. Though not my first time chairing a faculty search or serving on search committees, this was my first experience with a search committee for the KSU Library System. As we prepared for the search, we received some guidance and previous documentation from the unit director overseeing the position for which we were hiring, but unfortunately, our library administration provided us with little else. With outdated files on our intranet and unclear procedures, we found ourselves navigating the process independently, uncertain about our library's best practices and guidelines for conducting the search.

As a firm believer in inclusive searches that prioritize kindness and equity toward candidates, the lack of clear direction made things challenging. I wanted to create an empathetic and supportive environment for the candidates, understanding the anxiety that accompanies the job search process. However, I felt unsure about whether certain actions were allowed or if I needed permission to implement them. The constant uncertainty weighed heavily on me, as I wanted to ensure a fair and inclusive search while avoiding potential repercussions for breaking established norms.

Together, Chelsee and I decided to forge ahead and implement the practices we believed would provide a positive candidate experience, adhering to the adage "ask for forgiveness, not permission." We collaborated with our search committee to establish a set of guiding principles based on kindness and inclusivity. These principles included:

- Maintaining regular communication with candidates at appropriate intervals
- Providing five out of the six interview questions to candidates before the first- and second-round interviews[4]
- Not requiring cameras for the first interview and sharing the questions virtually using a PowerPoint slide deck for the candidates to read
- Putting together a detailed presentation scenario for finalists that guided them through the requirements for the presentation
- Including a list of what we expected from them during their presentation (e.g., to provide graphic design samples since the position was responsible for some graphic design) and what we did not expect from them (e.g., to have their entire presentation memorized)
- Creating a comprehensive daily schedule for finalists, outlining the purpose and topics of discussion for each meeting

Although we wished to incorporate more initiatives, these were the practices that we felt comfortable implementing without explicit permission. In truth, these actions were not revolutionary, nor were they uncommon in modern hiring practices.

By prioritizing kindness, empathy, and equity, we aimed to exemplify the values that represent the best of our institution and provide a positive candidate experience throughout the search process. We hope that these efforts will continue to create a more inclusive and supportive standard for search committees in the KSU Library System through the Recruitment and Retention Task Force.

## Chelsee Dickson, Scholarly Communications Librarian

As a newly minted college graduate embarking on the journey through library school in 2012, I applied for a position in a public library with trepidation—was I meant to personally

visit the branch manager, smile, and mildly beg to be hired? Were thank-you letters appropriate or too "old school"? What was expected of me as a candidate with no experience? After ruminating on these mysteries, I took it upon myself to walk into the public library, shakily hand my résumé to the branch manager, and promptly flee—I was hired a month later. Throughout the years, I've reflected on how daunting the search and interview process can be for any candidate. The underlying question of "What is expected of me in the search process?" is one that I still contemplate. Luckily, I've since gained confidence through my work as a public library employee, a technical college librarian, and a university librarian with faculty status, meaning I've survived a plethora of interviews.

We now live in a new era of hiring, one that is beginning to embrace the kindness, consideration, and patience I longed for when beginning my career. In 2021 I was contacted by a university and asked to apply for a librarian position. The search committee exhibited some kindness practices, such as providing the interview questions beforehand. Being sufficiently prepared is of great importance to someone suffering from imposter syndrome and anxiety, so having the ability to read through the questions before interviewing removed the sense of dread and fear of the unknown. This meant the world to me. I ultimately declined the opportunity for a second interview, but the experience struck me as significant.

Later that year, I applied for a librarian position at a different university. I was offered a phone interview and a subsequent virtual interview. In both instances, I was provided with the questions so that I could prepare. When invited to the virtual interview, I was given a set of questions that were identical to the first set—I thought, *this must be a mistake*. The search committee chair explained that it was in fact an opportunity: the committee wanted to provide space for me to tweak my responses, add overlooked details, and enhance my anecdotes. They did not want to scare me; they simply wanted me to display my best self. Had this been communicated when the questions were sent for the virtual interview, the intentions would have been clearer.

These experiences would later inform my work with Kristina as we co-chaired a search at KSU in 2022. As Kristina mentioned above, we provided five out of six questions to our candidates three days before their interview date. We devised a list of items we expected and items we did not, and we emphasized that we wanted the best candidate for the position, with an understanding that all-day academic interviews can be grueling and stressful. Our presentation prompt was designed to showcase the strengths of the candidate and provide them with a taste of the work in which they would be involved, rather than a throwaway presentation that engages neither the presenter nor the audience.

The work Kristina and I undertook to create an equitable, kind experience for our candidates should not be lost but expanded. Currently, KSU hiring committees start from scratch each time a new search is conducted. Why reinvent the wheel? Instead, our committees should build upon the advancements of previous searches. As a scholarly communications librarian and proponent of open access, I believe a digital repository of search committee materials would be fitting. Our institutional repository, which prides itself on the inclusion of nontraditional works, is an ideal host. Equitable hiring is not enough—we must standardize and sustain our practices, providing open and free access to our materials so that others may follow our lead.

## Karen Doster-Greenleaf, Director of Research and Instructional Services

With nearly 15 years as an academic librarian, I regularly see both sides of the hiring process, and, until recently, found myself compliant to the status quo of standard hiring practices. It wasn't until I began working at KSU that I began to question the disparity of experiences candidates endure despite established, albeit vague, hiring procedures. Although KSU's faculty handbook and HR policies outline basic procedures, they lack depth and consideration for the candidate experience, focusing on administrative structure rather than inclusivity and accessibility. This approach, which is common in many academic libraries,[5] prioritizes procedural adherence over individual needs, underscoring a broader need for a more humane, candidate-centered shift in hiring practices.

While observing state and institutional hiring requirements is crucial, integrating the library's identity and vision is equally important. However, inconsistencies in our practices have obscured this integration. My conversations with colleagues revealed varied experiences and pinpointed areas for improvement. I was curious to learn more about where we could improve and what parts of the hiring process were potentially the most difficult or important to the candidate. I also wanted to identify where the managers or hiring committees found difficulty. Many colleagues expressed general concerns with how interviews were conducted, but more specifically, the concerns focused on how interview questions were selected, the structure of the interviews, and why interviews varied as much as they did. For example, a faculty librarian who was hired in August had an experience that was different from another hired in March. The common thread was that each search committee and its chair had different directives and resources to conduct the search. After further inquiry, it became clear that similar systemic problems existed for staff searches.

Issues have emerged in faculty librarian searches as well, particularly during on-campus interviews. A recurring concern is the handling of the presentation portion of the interview. Candidates often face uncertainty due to inconsistent communication about the search committee's expectations. Houk and Nielsen note that "harm is created when the process is set up so that candidates do not know what they are being evaluated on, or when there are parts of the process that are intentionally included to be traps or stumbling areas for candidates,"[6] which, based on my discussions with recently hired colleagues, holds true, as several of our new librarians related to this sentiment. Even though they were the successful candidates, the new librarians expressed feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and a general overwhelming sensation that they were "missing something" when preparing for their presentations.

Additionally, the standard interview structure often lacks clarity about the attendees and purpose of various meetings. We discovered that certain pertinent information was provided during some interviews but not uniformly across all interviews, such as faculty or staff hiring expectations. I'm a firm believer that a candidate is interviewing the employer just as much as we are interviewing them. Therefore, it is crucial to offer every candidate consistent and comprehensive information that provides the opportunity to make their own informed decision as to whether they wish to work for us.

I take comfort in acknowledging that all the missteps made thus far were by-products of disconnect and complacency rather than ill intentions or malice. We know we can and should do better. Aligning our desire to be more consistent with hiring practices across the whole

library requires a comprehensive examination of recruitment procedures and documentation that have been in use over the past five years. The realization prompted more formal open discussions with library administration and unit directors about what our goals for the hiring process could be. We intend to take a bottom-up approach that puts some of the reform process into the hands of those who experienced the process firsthand.

## Conclusion

As we move forward with our task force's charge to reform and update the interview process, we aim to proceed intentionally with inclusion at the core. While the tenuous nature of the hiring process is what sparked this project, we understand that a new librarian's hiring experience does not end with the job offer. Our next challenge is to evaluate, improve, and standardize our onboarding procedures. The next phase will center on the candidate's and new hire's needs rather than the institutional status quo. We hope to shift the current intimidating power dynamic and build a more welcoming, empowering, and supporting working environment for our future colleagues.

## Notes

1. Sojourna Cunningham, Samantha Guss, and Jennifer Stout, "Challenging the 'Good Fit' Narrative: Creating Inclusive Recruitment Practices in Academic Libraries," 2019, 12–21, https://alair.ala.org/bitstream/handle/11213/17632/ChallengingtheGoodFitNarrative.pdf; Kathryn Houk and Jordan Nielsen, "Inclusive Hiring in Academic Libraries: A Qualitative Analysis of Attitudes and Reflections of Search Committee Members," *College & Research Libraries* 84, no. 7 (July 2023): 568–88, https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.84.4.568; Mimosa Shah and Dustin Fife, "Obstacles and Barriers in Hiring: Rethinking the Process to Open Doors," *College & Research Libraries News* 84, no. 2 (February 2023): 55–58, https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.84.2.55; Annie Bélanger et al., "Building Inclusive Libraries: Kindness, Equity, and Candidate Experiences in Hiring & Onboarding Toolkit," *Library Reports and Communication*, 2023, 1–62.
2. Houk and Nielsen, "Inclusive Hiring in Academic Libraries."
3. Cunningham, Guss, and Stout, "Challenging the 'Good Fit' Narrative," 17.
4. Normally we advocate for sending all interview questions in advance. However, the position we were screening for did involve being able to speak off-the-cuff, and because of this the committee decided to withhold a single question from the question set sent to candidates. Candidates were informed of this choice and given the reason why when they were sent the questions.
5. Shah and Fife, "Obstacles and Barriers in Hiring."
6. Houk and Nielsen, "Inclusive Hiring in Academic Libraries," 580.

Michael Kirby and Meredith Farkas

# Leading and Locked Out

## Academic Community College Librarianship

Academic Library Workers in Conversation is a *C&RL News* series focused on elevating the everyday conversations of library professionals. The wisdom of the watercooler has long been heralded, and this series hopes to go further by minimizing barriers to publishing with an accessible format. Each of the topics in the series were proposed by the authors, and they were given space to explore. This issue's conversation discusses the role of community college librarianship in our profession. The authors highlight how library workers at community colleges are often leading the way, while still being "locked out" from the dominant narratives of academic libraries.—*Dustin Fife, series editor*

**Michael Kirby:** Hi Meredith! Thank you again for agreeing to this conversation. I wanted to start with a little information about my workplace. Here at CUNY Kingsborough Community College, we have faculty status (as do librarians at other CUNYs), but, as you can imagine, the benefits awarded to faculty don't always translate. For example, there have been some questions about sabbaticals recently, which have been granted to librarians, but, to my knowledge, only at the four-year colleges of CUNY. Not only do we not have parity with faculty more generally, we also don't really seem to have parity with librarians in our own system. What does your work situation look like? Do you have faculty status?

**Meredith Farkas:** It's so nice to work with you Michael! We librarians also have faculty status at Portland Community College (PCC), and it's actually significantly less fraught than it was when I had faculty status at universities in the past. I have the same status and privileges as all full-time faculty; in fact, I'm writing this from my sabbatical. In my opinion, the most compelling reason for librarians to have faculty status is for us to be seen as educators and partners by faculty in other disciplines. While I've had some form of faculty status for all of my 19 years in academic libraries, my community college experience has been the only time when I truly felt like a peer to the vast majority of my faculty colleagues across the college. It's distressing to me that community college librarians are treated as somehow lesser librarians in your system, though I wish I could say I was surprised. I remember when I accepted my job at PCC in 2014, there were colleagues at my university who saw it as a step down, which was ironic, because it was my dream job. What are your thoughts on why other academic librarians see community college librarianship as less-than?

**Michael:** My guess is that this "less-than" mentality that exists within the profession has a lot to do with people's preconceived notions about community colleges in general and

Michael Kirby is metadata librarian at CUNY Kingsborough Community College, email: michael.kirby@kbcc.cuny.edu. Meredith Farkas is faculty librarian at Portland Community College, email: meredith.farkas@pcc.edu.

community college students in particular. Sabbaticals are for people with something worth researching, right? The unsaid part of this assumption, of course, is that community college librarians don't have anything worth researching. We kind of get back to this age-old (false) distinction between librarians as providers of service and librarians as scholars. Yes, I spend a lot of time doing reference work and information literacy, but these services warrant critical examination, and I think we (as community college librarians) can offer a unique perspective.

**Meredith:** We certainly can! When I worked at a research university, I felt pulled in a million different directions because we were meant to support the research needs of undergrads, graduate students, and faculty. It was a revelation to come to a community college, where I could concentrate much more deeply on my teaching and focus on the success of a smaller, though quite diverse, population. It was refreshing to work at a place where we were all so focused on our students. I learned more about quality teaching in my first year at the community college than I did in my previous nine years in libraries, six of which I'd spent as a head of instruction.

It was at the community college that I learned about trauma-informed practice, culturally responsive teaching, and other asset-based approaches. My colleagues are far more engaged in learning to be better teachers than anywhere else I've worked. My research with Lisa Hinchliffe[1] showed that community college libraries were far ahead of academic libraries in terms of building an assessment culture, yet when she and I presented our research at the ACRL 2015 Conference, it was only lightly attended, and almost entirely by community college librarians. There's so much that academic library workers of all types could learn from our work with community college students (many of whom end up at other colleges and universities), and yet we tend to get less support to present and publish.

**Michael:** I totally want to echo the point that many community college students end up at four-year universities. I believe the national statistic is about one-third of community college students transfer, although at certain institutions (like CUNY), it's much likely higher because of college credit reciprocity that's built into the system. My experience with assessment culture has been similar to yours in that it does really seem like community college librarians are more open to figuring out what works and what doesn't work in regards to teaching. This is probably because we do so much of it. I would go even further, however, and say that in my experience, community college librarians are exceedingly open to innovation across the board. You've mentioned trauma-informed practice and culturally responsive teaching, but a place that I've found that we've really been able to innovate at my institution is with open education.

It's often the case that librarians are relegated to supporting roles in open education (as administrators of institutional repositories, spokespeople for the "movement," etc.), but where are the OERs tailored for information literacy instruction? Of course, they've always existed; we've just never called them "OERs," and these resources we have been sharing for decades don't fit into the stereotypical model of the semester-length, open textbook. Various librarians at my institution have really been pushing against this narrative. But yes, I don't want to get too far off point. Community college librarians have heavy teaching loads, this naturally gives them unique practical insights, these insights are ignored because of the bias against research produced by community college librarians, and, finally, these insights are locked out of the official narrative of what it means to be a librarian. I seem to be talking in circles! Where do you think we go from here? Is there a solution somewhere?

**Meredith:** The leadership role many community college library workers have played in the open education movement is definitely not off point. It's another place where our unique experiences can be useful to other academic library workers.

Your phrase "locked out of the official narrative" is so insightful. When I was in library school, I certainly never heard or thought about community college librarianship. What I learned about academic librarianship looked like university library work. Certainly community college library workers are not the only ones left out of the narrative in our profession, but that narrative shapes our views of what is possible and what is valued in our field. It creates the petty hierarchies that devalue the work of so many in libraries. It encourages people to pursue certain types of work in certain settings because it appears most valued in the story of our profession. And it discourages others from even going to library school because they don't see a place for themselves. I think interrogating and changing the narrative of academic library work and how it is communicated throughout our profession is a good place to start.

I think our profession could do more to encourage scholarship from community college librarians. I've appreciated that ACRL has made an effort to include more community college workers and relevant content in their conferences, but speakers from community colleges are still expected to pay the same rate to attend as attendees from better-resourced institutions. I remember the Library Instruction West Conference in 2020 had a lower rate for community college and public librarians to encourage more diverse participation and in acknowledgment of the reality of our funding. More scholarships and grants specifically for community college library workers to present at conferences would definitely encourage more cross-pollination.

I also think community college library leaders need to place value on their employees sharing the great work they're doing and make it part of their jobs. The one thing I do miss about university librarianship was that scholarship was part of my job, and so I was able to engage in scholarship during work time. Our scholarship not only enriches the profession, but enriches our own practice, thereby improving our own libraries.

**Michael:** To your point about encouraging scholarship, I've often been encouraged just through exposure to the work about community colleges that, in spite of all of the obstacles we've covered, proudly insists on existing. I'll highlight a recent favorite: A comprehensive series of books (edited by Janet Pinkley and Kaela Casey) have been coming out from ACRL. Some of the titles include *The Community College Library: Reference and Instruction* and *The Community College Library: Assessment*, and I believe a third book is in the works. These are great entry points for anyone that's a new hire at a community college and has questions about what the workload might look like on a daily basis.

**Meredith:** Yes, there are community college librarians making great scholarship happen in spite of the barriers, and there are some community college libraries that do value and support scholarship. There's hope for sure! More than anything, though, I wish that workers at other types of academic libraries would recognize that there are useful things they can learn from community college library workers and value the unique insights we develop because of the nature of our work. We have so much to offer, and not just to other community college workers.

## Note

1. Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe and Meredith Farkas, "Community College Libraries and Culture of Assessment: A Survey of Library Leaders," *Proceedings of the 2014 Library Assessment Conference, Seattle, WA* (2014): 183–87, https://www.libraryassessment.org/wp-content/uploads/bm~doc/proceedings-lac-2014.pdf.

Jennifer Matthews and Ane Turner Johnson

# What Students Want

## Electronic v. Print Books in the Academic Library

Attending college can be a significant milestone in many young adults' lives. For some, it is a well-worn path walked by multiple generations, while for others, it is a new journey marked by an unfamiliarity with the expectations of the collegiate environment. First-generation college students do not have generations of experience and knowledge to rely on or to consult regarding academia's hidden policies and procedures. As a result, understanding aspects of college life that reinforce first-generation students' efforts to succeed throughout their college journey is essential for libraries. Today's university administration tends to assume that first-generation students are digital natives who prefer electronic resources since they have grown up surrounded by this technology.[1] On the other hand, libraries have witnessed first-generation students frustrated by current technology despite their digital native status, adding another barrier to success.

Besides being alert to how engaged students may be with technology, libraries are also fundamentally aware that print books and electronic books lead to different outcomes depending on the reading styles of students.[2] Print books have been linked to deeper focus and concentration, better integration of concepts, and easier memorization. In contrast, electronic books are linked to quick decision-making, rapid pattern recognition, instant gratification, and often impatience when results are not immediate.[3] The choice of reading material often aligns with the student's desired reading style to achieve the optimum outcome.

Perhaps more than ever, libraries should know students' preferences for reading materials when preparing for classroom assignments and exams. This is especially important when university administrations are unilaterally determining to close brick-and-mortar libraries for virtual versions with little input from those affected.[4] Fortunately, recent examples of such efforts did not materialize after community objections. A focus on digital resources requires careful consideration of library policies by policymakers to ensure that they reflect the university's public mission and ensure the success of all students. At Rowan University, one such endeavor was to embark on this study to determine if our policies actually reflected the ways in which the student body used the library collection.

## About the Institution

Rowan University is a four-year public research institution in the northeastern United States. It has a rapidly growing undergraduate student population, with over one-third identifying

Jennifer Matthews is head of collection services at the Rowan University Campbell Library, email: matthewsj@rowan.edu. Ane Turner Johnson is professor of educational leadership, administration, and research at Rowan University, email: johnsona@rowan.edu.

as members of underrepresented groups, plus 5,711 self-identified first-generation students. Like many research institutions, it boasts a multi-library system, with two medical libraries catering mainly to graduate students and a central library focusing primarily on the undergraduate student population. With such a large body of first-generation students, the study team, which consisted of a librarian doctoral student and their advisor, was interested in learning how the library's current electronic primary collection policy might affect this population, as this policy requires the purchase of electronic books first, with rare exceptions for print book purchasing.

Rowan University has been an e-primary institution since 2015 to address many issues, including lack of space. Rowan University Library's collection development policy was adapted to reflect this need and requires that the library purchase materials in an electronic format first, with exceptions for curricular and format needs. In practice, this policy has led to frustration and annoyance with the library for students who cannot access materials in their preferred format.

## Investigating Library Policy

In the fall of 2022, the study team designed a mixed methods study to explore the effectiveness of the electronic primary policy and received IRB approval. Data were collected in two parallel phases and used an intrinsic case study design to focus on first-generation college students at Rowan University.[5] The study aimed to better understand this population's behaviors and preferences toward print or electronic books in the Rowan University Libraries' collection. The quantitative phase focused on the Academic Reading Questionnaire,[6] which was chosen because Likert items are designed to measure an individual's attitudes toward a particular topic, and attitudes displayed by individuals indicate a positive behavioral belief.[7] Analyzing these results informed the study team of behavioral beliefs toward print or electronic books. The survey, distributed twice during the fall semester using stratified random sampling methods, included continuing-generation college students, soliciting 318 responses. The data, collected via Rowan University's instance of Qualtrics, were downloaded, then analyzed using SPSS software. All personal information was kept in a separate anonymized and password-protected file. Survey questions were then analyzed using contingency tables.

From the survey, 80 indicated interest, but 19 first-generation college students self-identified to be interviewed. The survey team then undertook a qualitative phase with these students to evaluate their engagement with library resources considering their unique collegiate needs and analyzed using Stake's categorical aggregation technique.[8] During the interviews, participants could highlight and expand upon their preferences for using the print or electronic book collection in the Rowan University Libraries. All data were collected during the 2021–2022 academic year.

## What We Learned

Through this mixed-methods study, the team discovered that both continuing-generation and first-generation students primarily prefer print books for course materials. In fact, kinesthetic learning was a prominent component of student preferences and relates to reading style through skimming or detailed reading as used by the student. Specific survey or interview questions did not cover this attribute. It first appeared in the survey's free text area but

was fully uncovered during the study team's interviews. During these interviews with first-generation college students, they frequently mentioned their need to touch course materials. Below, three key aspects of participants' kinesthetic learning experience are explored.

**Kinesthetic Learning**

While the need to touch course materials was not covered in the survey, several participants did mention this in the survey's open-text field. In this section, participants said, "there is something about actually holding the material. It makes me able to comprehend the material better," and "I prefer to annotate and work from a print version. I work best if I can turn the pages myself, and it's easier to keep track of places I need to refer to." One participant simply stated, "I think using the kinesthetic method is good for the student." Again, participants were not queried about kinesthetic learning but about overall preferences for course materials rather than specifics, such as if they preferred to flip pages or scroll screens. Regardless, the need to touch the material was critical in their learning.

**Recalling Material**

In many cases, touch is related to the ability to recall a fact or reinforce subject matter while studying. Turning the page accentuates the material differently for these first-generation participants than the endlessly scrolling electronic book page. Most participants felt that the tactile experience of holding a book or flipping a page strengthened information retention as they studied. Sabrina stated,

> I like having it in front of me. I like flipping through pages, trying to find texts. It's better for me to focus, and overall, I just like physically having it in front of me that I can hold.

Other participants, like Dave, echoed this sentiment, stating, "I don't retain as much without having the book in front of me. I guess you get the extra tactile feedback." Thus, a direct connection exists between physically holding the text, focusing on the material, and later recalling it, making this a vital aspect of their study habits.

**Deeper Engagement**

Comparatively, participants felt that electronic books—with their never-ending screens—were too ephemeral in design and made it harder to pinpoint information without taking copious handwritten notes, printing information, or highlighting and annotating those documents. Almost as a group, participants mentioned that they do not read electronic books as deeply as they do print books. For instance, Nazir states,

> I know I'm going to go through it quickly. I'm not going to absorb it and sit down. You know how people say, "Oh, skim over it?" One, I'm not that good at that, but when I'm using digital, it makes me do it.

In fact, direct engagement with the text became an event through which participants nurtured their learning. Nazir mentioned that he preferred printed books so that he "could go in the library. I can sit down, open it. I know I'm going to make an event out of the book. I like to really nurture it and really go through it." Participants who sought that physical

element were better able to reinforce, to nurture their learning through a deeper engagement with the content.

## Next Steps

This study made apparent that while undergraduate students work in both print and electronic mediums, it is impossible to predict a common preference from one group of students to the next. Sharing the results of this study with both the library administration and the Provost's office will enable discussions regarding current policies and practices at Rowan University that would allow for reflection surrounding student reading styles and the purchasing requirements that might affect these preferences. Additionally, engaging with the first-generation task force on campus could help construct more informed policies surrounding library materials and reading preferences, thus removing hidden barriers from this population. Finally, an expanded version of the study that seeks to understand how all underrepresented groups use library materials would lead to better policies and practices overall for the Rowan University Libraries.

## Conclusion

Attending college for first-generation students is challenging, with many obstacles and barriers. University administrations and libraries often assume first-generation students are digital natives and have created policies that, in a significant part, do not consider how these students ultimately engage with library materials.

The work conducted in this study reinforced that first-generation students choose their reading material preference based on classroom assignments and exams. Libraries such as Rowan University that have an electronic resource–first policy are creating a disservice to not just their first-generation student population but, as this study indicated, other student populations on campus. From the administrative point of view, it appears beneficial to the student population to make resources widely available through electronic resource packages, which can be accessed from multiple locations and by the maximum number of individuals. However, participants interviewed and surveyed have strongly indicated that this does not adequately replace the print format for study and focus. It is also cheaper for the administration to make these resources available electronically because they no longer need to provide square footage for their print counterpart. Conversely, electronic materials are also typically purchased in packages (e.g., "Big Deals)" that, while often negotiated to the best of the library's ability, still cost thousands more than the average print book version.

Rowan University Libraries and libraries of a similar class—for example, public research institutions catering to first-generation student populations—must continue providing greater access to print books for this population and other student populations with similar preferences and needs despite the electronic-first policies. As university administrations continue to push for an electronic-only library, it is essential to provide hard data from studies such as this to indicate the continued need for print collections. Libraries need to continue to advocate strongly for resources that are in the best interest of the students to facilitate student success and matriculation. Through joint conversations, the Rowan University Libraries and similar libraries can continue to ensure that policies and procedures are developed and maintained that do not undermine specific student populations in the future, but rather factor into these populations' college success.

## Notes

1. Marc Prensky, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants, Part 1," *On the Horizon* 9, no. 5 (2001): 1–6, https://doi.org/10.1108/10748120110424816.
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4. Jeralyn Darling, "VT Digger: Vermont State University to Close Libraries, Downgrade Sports Programs," Newstex, Singer Island, February 8, 2023; David Jesse, "After Protests and a Resignation, a New University Withdraws a Plan for a Digital-First Library," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 25, 2023.
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Erin Steckel

# Conversation Hour in the Academic Library

## A Getting Started Guide

Conversation programming is library programming that supports English language learners. Typically, this programming has often been conducted in public libraries, where librarians or volunteers host a small group session, either in person or on a video-conferencing platform, for English language learners to practice listening and speaking skills. For the academic library, conversation programming is an increasingly relevant program as the immigrant-origin student populations continue to grow.[1] However, moving from a traditional conversation programming curriculum to one tailored to the academic population requires some thought and preparation. In the Winterim semester of 2022–2023, I started a Conversation Hour program at the Scott Community College (SCC) Library at the request of a student, which has grown to be a useful tool as we build a pipeline from our non-credit to credit English-language learner classes. The following are my reflections that will hopefully provide insight for community colleges that offer both non-credit adult education and credit ELL classes to consider adding a program to support their English language learner population.

## Creating the Program

In preparation, I observed two programs from public libraries that still held their conversation hour programming in an online format. This, and the consent of the programming library, were the only two criteria I had for choosing a program to observe. After searching the online calendars of various public libraries and contacting the program facilitator, I was able to sit in on two sessions: one with the Brooklyn Public Library and one with the Orange County Public Library. To both libraries and to the amazing librarians and volunteers who put on conversation programs, I am incredibly grateful, as the observations allowed me to develop a program that is useful to our student and public patrons.

The programs were almost perfectly opposite, giving them the opportunity to observe and take what I thought would work best for our population. The Brooklyn Public Library program was incredibly structured; the volunteer who ran the program created a lesson plan with lesson objectives, which was followed from start to finish. Vocabulary and grammatical structures addressed in the program were defined upfront, which often give students the feeling that they are learning something immediately applicable. This structured approach really allowed for the group to maximize their learning and may have lowered anxiety as it gave participants an opportunity to prepare for the type of language they would be using. The next program I reviewed was from the Orange County Public Library. This was run by a

Erin Steckel is library technician I at the Scott Community College Library, email: esteckel@eicc.edu.

library staff member and was much more unstructured, so much so that students suggested topics as the program ran, giving students practice in authentic, organic conversations. In contrast to the Brooklyn Public Library program, vocabulary was addressed as it occurred in conversation.

I took away so many valuable lessons from my observations, including pacing and activities that I could immediately apply as I developed my own program. As I adapted from these two libraries, I also wanted to consider my audience. Since my program worked for both the non-credit adult education program, which had students whose goals range from wanting to go to college to wanting to enter the workforce to wanting to engage more fully in society, and the for-credit students, who were already enrolled in college, I thought a combination of the two programs was most appropriate. Students could practice having organic conversations in part of the program and we could practice more structured language development in part.

## Choosing Modality

The conversation hour program is a one-hour session that runs on Tuesdays from 10 to 11 a.m. over Zoom. Each session consists of a conversation topic and a mini lesson. Examples of mini lessons include things like giving advice or summarizing. Typically, we do not extend the lesson beyond one session so that students can choose to attend every week or choose to drop-in when the program fits into their schedule.

Scott Community College has many satellite campuses, including the campus that runs the adult learner classes. Because of this, I thought a Zoom class would give students from all campuses the best ability to attend. However, there are many things to consider when choosing a modality: What are the goals of the program? If one goal is to build a supportive community for English language learners at a commuter campus, then an in-person option may be the best option for both practicing language acquisition and building a learner community. Another consideration: does the college layout support a centralized approach? In-person options allow students to get a feel for the college experience in a safe environment, so it might have more effective outcomes for moving from non-credit to credit side classes. However, if, like at SCC, the campuses are spread out, then a Zoom option would best maximize student's ability to participate.

## Activities

From the start of the program, I began each session with a conversation topic. There are many sites with freely available conversation topic ideas online, but to differentiate for academic conversations, eliciting faculty suggestions might be a helpful resource as well. For example, a media literacy instructor was conducting a class on books and their relevance in contemporary society. She asked her class "Are books still relevant?" (luckily the students unanimously agreed they were), so I decided to use the same topic in my program so that the students were exposed to real topics they might have in their college classes. This also allowed us to explore current events, as the discussion of the relevancy of books naturally leads to the discussion around the recent phenomenon of book banning, which has been frequently in the news as of late.

Conversation topics are a nice way to get students warmed up for talking without having to think too much like explaining the rules of a game might require. I found the conversation

topics best for warmups are general and ease the students into talking. In one of the programs I observed, simply starting with "How are you?" worked nicely. For the academic crowd, maybe "How are classes going?" Be prepared to change tactics for each group, however. Some groups warm up better with structured activities. A game can help students think about creating one language structure at a time.

Games can also be differentiated for academic needs. For example, the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) requires the ability to craft an argument. One game we play together is "Hot Takes," which asks students to debate the merits of something completely innocuous, such as "oatmeal raisin cookies are better than chocolate chip cookies." Students learn the art of supporting their position with reason on a low-stakes topic while learning to organize their thoughts into a cohesive argument for the TOEFL's opinion-based essay.

Here are some other example activities that I have used in Conversation Hour programs:

- 20 Questions: Helps students practice forming questions and thinking on the spot.
- Would You Rather: Helps students practice defending their position on something.
- Reading the News: Helps students practice reading aloud and I ask students to summarize afterward. Summarization is a requirement for the TOEFL speaking test.
- The Alphabet Game: Helps students with improvisational thinking.

There are many websites to help with programming and curriculum design for the adult English learner.[2] One trick for differentiating for the academic program is to study the materials that students might encounter. The academic word list can help show the vocabulary that a student might encounter in higher education, which can also be used to tailor an activity so that students might start encountering those words more often. Here is an example: play 20 Questions with the nouns on the academic word list, such as data, economy, function, theory, resource, credit, element, etc. This may be difficult at first, so you might need both to have a word bank and example questions that students can choose from, such as "Does it have to do with [math/science/language arts]?" or "Can you see it?" (because there are so many abstract nouns, you might also need to allow some leeway in answering, such as allowing "sometimes" or "parts of it").

## Marketing and Steady Attendance

Programming in the academic library is tricky because most patrons are students who are busy with their studies. It is easy for something like Conversation Hour to fall off a student's radar as the semester progresses. On the one hand, it is important for the librarian or volunteer to understand this and give students grace and time to come and go as they need. One way the facilitator can respect this is by creating individual lessons that do not carry over week to week, giving students the opportunity to participate in each lesson without the need to have attended prior lessons.

There are also many students who want to participate, but due to their busy schedule, they simply forget. One technique I use to remind students is by using a mailing list. I collected student's email addresses and sent reminders to our students the day before our Conversation Hour class. This helps put the program back on the patron's radar without being too overwhelming. On one occasion, I forgot to send the reminder and there was a noticeable drop off in attendance.

## Conclusion

The SCC Library Conversation Hour program has grown to about 25 interested students from both the credit and non-credit side of the college, with about six students regularly attending each week. Some of our Conversation Hour students have successfully enrolled and completed credit-side classes. One member has joined the library as a volunteer to gain work experience and continue practicing their speaking and listening skills. We plan to continue the program for the next semester, offering more time slots to accommodate morning and afternoon students.

To create an effective program, it is important for librarians to do some thinking and planning beforehand. One of the most helpful planning tips was reaching out to successful library programs and noting what works and how to pace a session. It was also necessary to establish student goals and needs and incorporate those into lessons. Active listening, being flexible, and trying new things are key to a conversation hour program. As we continue to add students in the future, we will tailor the programs to their needs and prepare our English language learners for work and higher education. Programming can be an important but often forgotten piece of the academic library puzzle, especially at the community college, but SCC Library has found that conversation hour programming can create a learner community within the student body.

## Notes

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Devin Savage and Steve Borrelli

# 2022 ACRL Academic Library Trends and Statistics Survey

## Highlights and Key Findings

Each year, ACRL's Academic Library Trends and Statistics Survey provides data that can help the profession understand how academic libraries provide and demonstrate their impact and value to their users, institutions, and communities. Findings from the 2022 survey continued this tradition while also supplying additional insight into how library services and use continued to evolve.

The 2022 survey collected data from 1,533 academic libraries[1] in two main areas. First, a standard set of questions related to collections (including titles held, volumes, and electronic books); expenditures (library materials, salaries, and wages, etc.); library services; and staffing. For the Library Trends section, a one-time set of survey questions focused on the anticipation of post-pandemic changes in library activity, professional development, flexible/remote work arrangements, and hiring procedures.

The highlights and insights below from each area are based on data from ACRL's Benchmark: Library Metrics and Trends tool (https://librarybenchmark.org/). Academic libraries completing the survey have free access to their own survey responses and selected aggregate data. Benchmark subscribers can leverage data outputs to perform institution-specific analysis for benchmarking, self-studies, budgeting, strategic planning, annual reports, and grant applications.

The Academic Library Trends and Statistics Survey Editorial Board thanks the academic libraries that participated, including the 155 first-time contributors. The response rate increased from 42%[2] to 44.4%.

## Standard Survey Question Data

The ACRL survey collects data for a standard set of questions related to expenditures, staffing, information and other services, collections, and more. This set includes all questions in the IPEDS Academic Library Component (https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/report-your-data/resource-center-academic-libraries), with instructions and definitions completely aligned. Academic libraries' responses to these longitudinal questions can demonstrate consistency, disruption, or, in some cases, a surprising combination of the two.

Academic libraries' total expenditures had decreased about 7% over the previous three-year period (2019–2021) but increased by 6.6% from 2021 to 2022. The average salaries

Devin Savage is a member of the ACRL Academic Library Trends and Statistics Survey Editorial Board and dean of libraries at the Illinois Institute of Technology, email: dsavage@iit.edu. Steve Borrelli is a member of the ACRL Academic Library Trends and Statistics Survey Editorial Board and head of library assessment at Penn State University, email smb96@psu.edu.

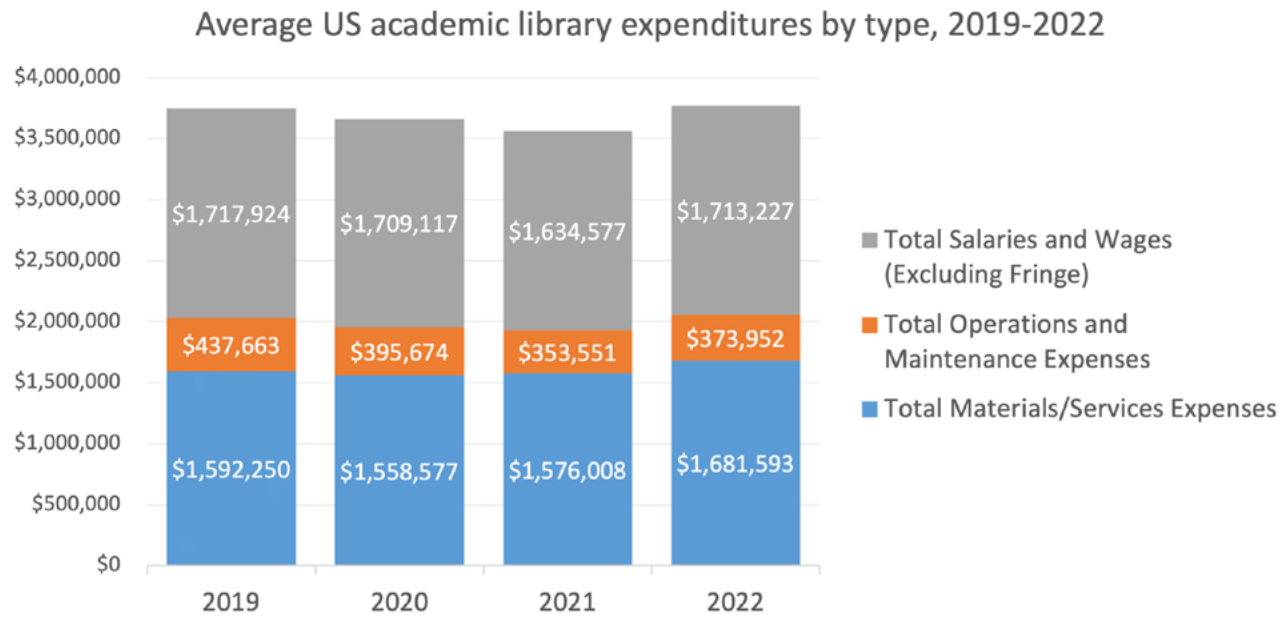


Figure 1. Average US academic library expenditures, 2019, 2021, 2022

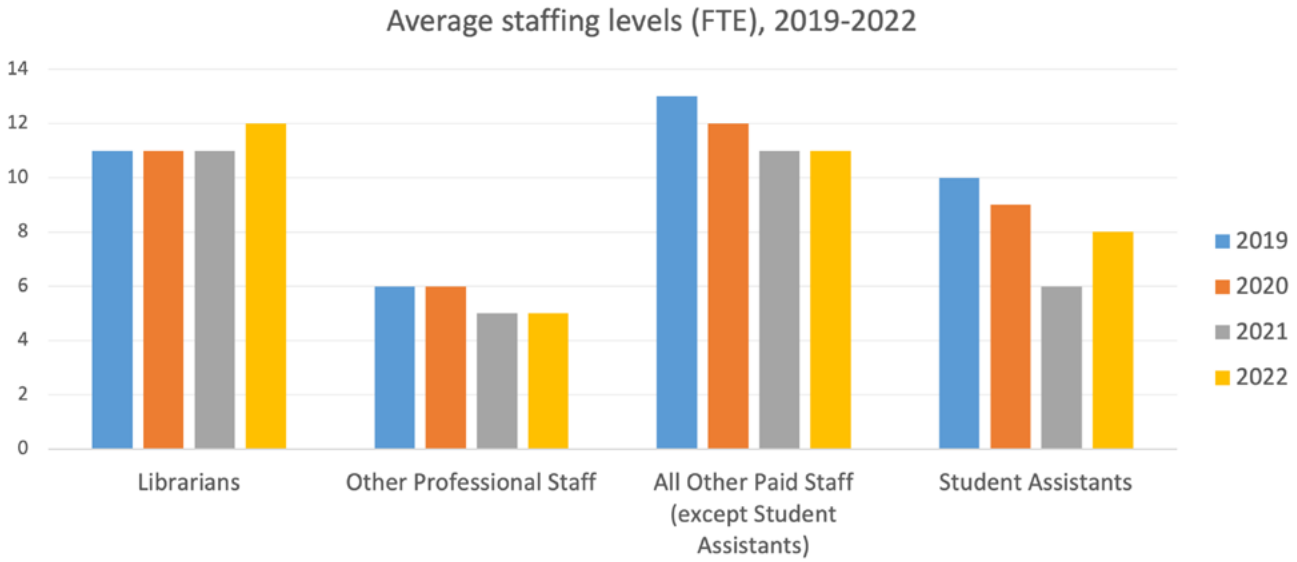


Figure 2. Average staffing levels, 2019, 2021, and 2022

and wages increased about 4.9% from the previous year, operations and maintenance expenditures rose by 5.8%, and materials/services expenditures rose 7.3% on average, with the average expenditures shown in figure 1. This was a notable reversal of post-pandemic trends and is also reflected in staffing levels, as the average number of librarians and student staff ticked back up slightly from 2021, although other staffing levels remained steady (as seen in figure 2).

One of the most notable developments in library expenditures can be seen in the average percentage of total library expenditures spent on ongoing commitments to subscriptions when broken down by Carnegie Class (figure 3). The percentages have remained steady for Doctoral Universities, Associate's Colleges, and Two-Year Institutions before, during, and after the pandemic. However, this percentage peaked for Master's Colleges during the pandemic, rising to 37% from 32%, and now has fallen back down to 31% in 2022. An

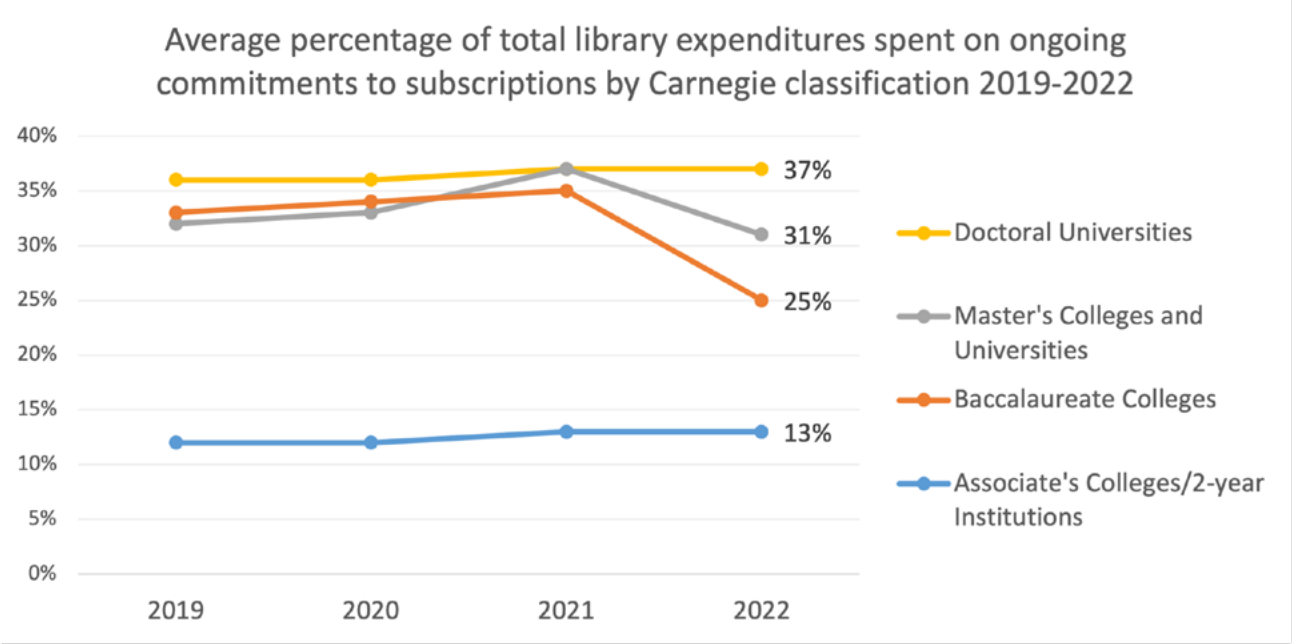


Figure 3. Average percentage of total library expenditures spent on ongoing commitments to subscriptions by Carnegie Class 2019–2022

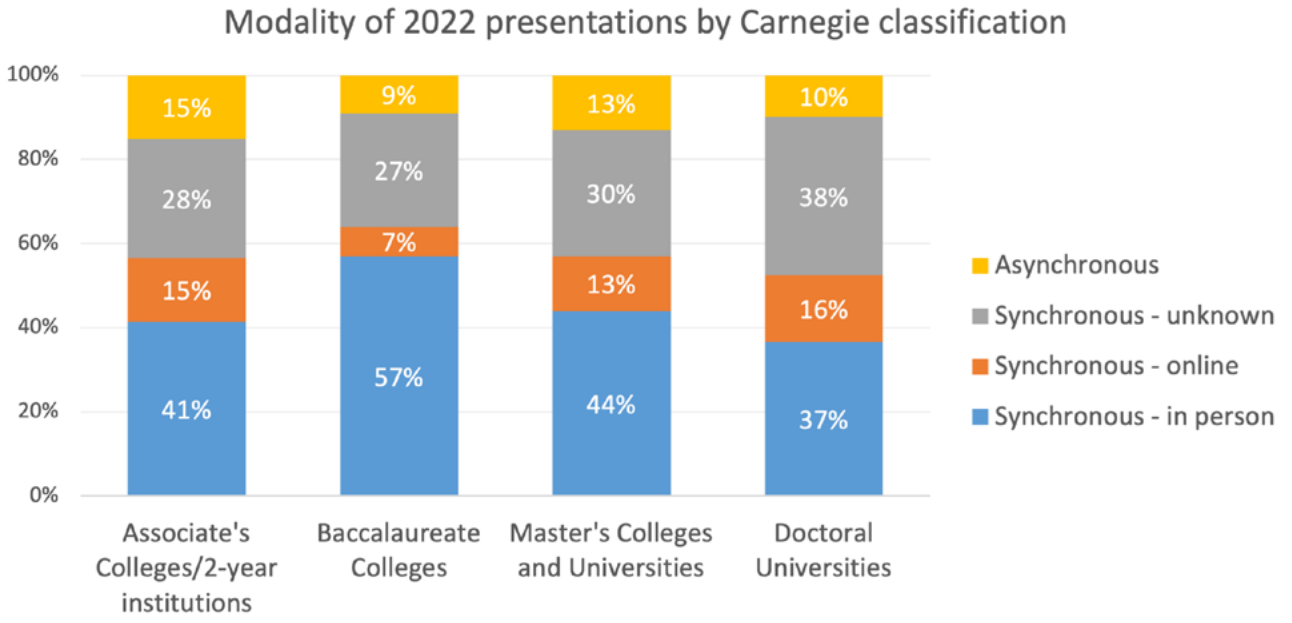


Figure 4. Modality of 2022 presentations by Carnegie Classification

even more stark difference is the drop for Baccalaureate Colleges, which had been slowly increasing the percentage spent on ongoing commitments to subscriptions over the last few years, culminating in 2021's 35% mark. In 2022, this number plunged to 25%, and this seems like a ripe area for further investigation.

Regarding services, there was some confusion about reporting transactions and consultations separately or as a combined number. The number of institutions reporting these as a combined number rose 10%. There were some data issues that caused uncertainty as to whether transactions and consultations are rising or falling over time. There was a dramatic decrease in the percentage of total information services to individuals delivered virtually, dropping from 61% in 2021 to only 17% in 2022.

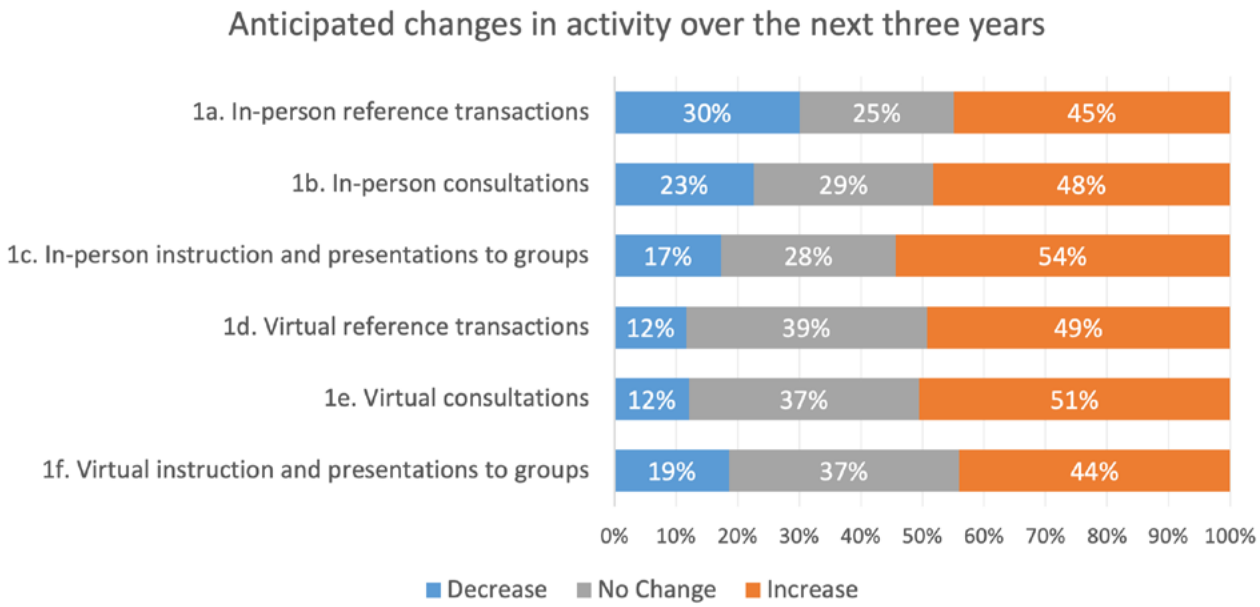


Figure 5. Anticipated changes in activity over the next three years

Presentation activity rose sharply from 2021 to 2022, although the total numbers still lag behind pre-pandemic levels. The number of presentations rose by 25% to a total number of 377,825, while overall attendance increased by 23% to a reported level of 5,685,008. Asynchronous instruction and online synchronous instruction made up a significant percentage of activity, ranging from 16% among Baccalaureate Colleges to 30% at two-year institutions. Figure 4 shows the breakdown of the percentage of each modality by Carnegie Classification.

## Library Trends Questions on Post-Pandemic Professional Development and Landscape

Every year, the ACRL survey contains a short set of questions to gather and share information on more recent developments or "Trends." In the Trends section for 2022, questions were posed to gauge respondents' anticipation of post-pandemic changes in library activity, professional development, flexible/remote work arrangements, and hiring procedures. Notably, respondents expected activity to increase more than decrease, with the highest level of confidence for in-person presentations (figure 5). For professional development format, employee preference for virtual or in-person format far outweighed expectations of mandates.

Virtual or in-person preference per employee led with 44% against only 9% preference for in-person wherever available. The budget for professional development was mostly expected to stay the same (57%), but a slight advantage for decrease (19%) over increase (13%) suggests some level of pessimism. As for the possible change in hiring practices, only 27% of respondents stated that no flexible work arrangements would be offered, whereas 42% offered hybrid work schedules and 37% offered flexible work hours (figure 6). Also, only 27% of employers noted that hybrid/remote work options would be explicitly listed in job ads. The anecdotal evidence that the editorial board had heard regarding the tightness of the labor market seemed to be supported specifically in candidate pools. In hiring new employees, only 4% of respondents felt that the pools were larger, while 46% reported that the pools were smaller.

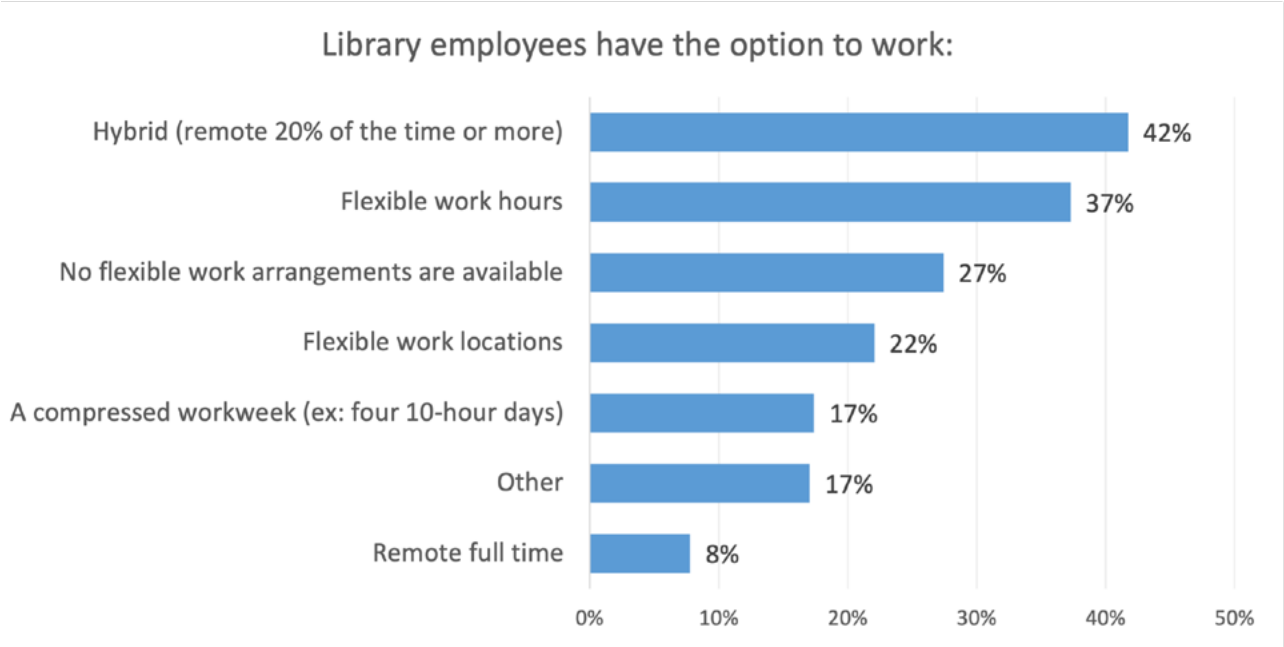


Figure 6. Library employees have the option to work

## About the Survey

The annual ACRL Academic Library Trends and Statistics Survey is the largest of its kind and offers the most comprehensive picture of academic library budgets, staffing, teaching, services, collections, and more. The data facilitates benchmarking, assessment of impact over time, tracking of new trends, and demonstration of academic library value. The survey is generally open from September through February each year to align with the Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS) collection. Libraries completing the survey can easily download their IPEDS responses to share with their local IPEDS keyholder. Libraries required to submit Academic Library Component data to IPEDS can download a file containing all the data required for the IPEDS Academic Library Component and share it with their campus IPEDS keyholder.

The survey is developed and administered annually by the ACRL Academic Library Trends and Statistics Survey Editorial Board (https://www.ala.org/acrl/aboutacrl/directoryofleadership/editorialboards/acr-stats) in collaboration with ACRL staff. The editorial board recognizes ACRL's Gena Parsons-Diamond for her collaboration and contributions. From the biggest picture to the smallest detail, she has demonstrated ACRL's commitment to the ongoing success of the Benchmark tool, which launched in 2021, as well as the annual survey.

## Notes

1. For the purposes of this article, all data is derived from the summary data results available through ACRL Benchmark, unless otherwise noted. Institutions that complete the survey receive complimentary access to this data.

2. Laura Rose Taylor, "2021 ACRL Academic Library Trends and Statistics Survey: Highlights and Key Academic Library Instruction and Group Presentation Findings," *College & Research Library News* 84, no. 3 (2022), https://crln.acrl.org/index.php/crlnews/article/view/25850/337w84.

Jeanine Mazak-Kahne, Theresa McDevitt, and Lorilie Blose

# Academic Libraries and Public Art

## Engaging Students in a Timely Discussion

Academic libraries are dynamic institutions that are constantly changing in response to the needs and wants of their users. At the same time, they are also the offices that house the institution's archives and are responsible for preserving the records that document the institution's past. While they strive to adopt best practices consistent with student needs, they also work to protect and preserve the past. Such roles can be at odds.

What do libraries do when current student and administrative priorities, tastes, and institutional missions clash with their interest in preserving the past? Are libraries' users best served by exclusively supporting current taste and initiatives, or does preservation of the past serve students and institutions more? Can libraries use existing historic places to share significant historical stories about their institution and still be perceived as current and attractive? These questions are ones that librarians might struggle with, but they do not have to struggle alone.

Academic libraries exist in colleges and universities that are staffed by discipline-specific experts and the students who are training in these disciplines. Librarians, who work daily with faculty and students, have a ready opportunity to seek advice from both seasoned and budding experts and include them in discussions on authentic dilemmas that libraries face. Collaboration may result in more informed decision-making, as well as provide educational and professional benefits for students as they build work skills, develop more impressive vitas, and become more deeply engaged in their learning.

Public history programs provide students with civically engaged instruction, often incorporating practical projects into traditional classroom learning. Public history fields include librarianship and/or encourage strong relationships with libraries and librarians not only as a source of research, but also as tied to their nature as being public service–oriented. Both have a concern for ensuring information is preserved and shared, and shape community and identity, in shared, as well as unique ways.

During the 2022–2023 academic year, an Indiana University of Pennsylvania Libraries issue related to historic public art was brought to faculty and students with an expertise in public history when seeking a practical solution to a real-world problem. This article will describe the problem, the collaboration, and the manner in which the service-learning activity at once benefited the library, faculty, and students.

Jeanine Mazak-Kahne is associate professor at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania History Department, email: jmkahne@iup.edu. Theresa McDevitt is government information and outreach librarian at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, email: mcdevitt@iup.edu. Lorilie Blose is currently a student in the Clarion University Department of Information and Library Science, email: lorilieblose1012@icloud.com.


Mural tracing the evolution of communications, located in a stairwell of the IUP Stabley Library. The mural was installed c. 1960s by student and artist Wayne Hawxhurst. Photo by Rhonda Yeager.

## The People and the Issue

Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) is a mid-sized public university in Western Pennsylvania that began as a Normal School in 1875 to prepare teachers for common schools. Over the years, it developed into a university with an R2 or High Research Activity classification. In the summer of 2022, IUP Libraries were renovated to support student success by physically uniting a number of campus support services and creating a Learning Commons in the library facility. In the course of the renovations, a stairway previously available only to staff was again opened to the public and a mural painted in the late 1960s was rediscovered. The mural was painted as part of a course assignment by a graduate student who loved the library. It illustrated the evolution of information storage and sharing from the beginning of time to the 1960s. Although it survived for more than 50 years, in the fall of 2022 the new renovations and resulting altered traffic patterns drew attention to the mural and led some to question whether it should be preserved or painted over. Interesting in its time, and related to the library's current and historical mission, it was not consistent with the more minimalist and standardized style of the renovated building. The question arose: should it be painted over, or should it be preserved?

## Public History Instruction and Libraries

Theresa McDevitt is a librarian who has a PhD in history. Over the years she has developed several history-based initiatives in the library and university communities and long served

as the embedded librarian for the History Department. In this role, McDevitt has worked closely with Jeanine Mazak-Kahne, a public history professor, to develop authentic public history assignments based upon existing local history records. Mazak-Kahne considers this relationship as essential in providing critical instruction to public history students, from information literacy to research practices in local history.

Instruction in public history is anchored in understanding and fostering the preservation of cultural heritage, whether it be on the local level or a national scale. Course materials and faculty instruction involve a historical understanding of community and memory, especially that fostered by cultural and heritage objects created (such as public art or memorials) for a given purpose and examining how purpose and meaning change over time. In contemporary discussions, the weight has fallen on monuments and memorials. Discussion is often lively and reflective; however, for many, these issues are abstract as students are removed by space and time from the objects and the surrounding debates.

Also critical to public history instruction is the understanding of community and memory. While typical case studies examined in the classroom are often part of larger debates over a national identity, in reality, peoples' lives are most often rooted in the local identity, community, and memory. As students are part of a university community, public history professors recognize that student learning and engagement with material deepens when an understanding of place, identity, and memory is drawn from their immediate surroundings. This leads to the development of connections to the community in which they are immersed in new ways. Through projects that stem from authentic local issues, students apply what they have learned in the classroom to their immediate, discuss identity, memory, and community values and how they have changed over time.

Students in the IUP public history program comprise multiple disciplines from history and anthropology to art and English. Students continue to work in a variety of fields, including historic sites and museums, but also in archives and libraries, and they benefit from developing an understanding of how information is preserved and used in these different organizations. Therefore, it is an ideal situation to work with the embedded librarian and university library to develop authentic applications of theory at every opportunity possible.

## The Assignment

Discussion of whether the library mural should be painted over came just at the time when instruction in the public history course shifted to the meaning of memory and identity as preserved and expressed in public monuments, memorials, and art. In this course, students are encouraged to think about how the meaning of public objects change over time and how evolving meaning and understanding of our past causes us to reinterpret these objects. They also seek to explore how objects have different meanings within the community and how public historians must navigate and negotiate these meanings among different groups and provide professional insight when called upon.

McDevitt and Mazak-Kahne felt that the discussion of whether the mural should be preserved or painted over would be a good authentic assignment for students. Students in two public history classes, Introduction to Public History and History Museums and Historic Sites, visited the library and read about the mural's history in an alumni newsletter article. They were then asked to call upon what they had learned so far to provide advice to the libraries on the disposition of the mural. The mission of the libraries was shared, and the

historical value of the mural and possible significance of its having been painted by an alumnus was considered. They were able to recommend that it be preserved or painted over. If they chose the latter, they were asked to suggest ways that the historical information intrinsic to the artifact could be preserved. Discussion prompts included those related to historical significance, historical content accuracy, artistic quality, and impact of ease of navigation when the space might be used for navigational signs.

While considering this real-world dilemma, they were asked to consider what the historical significance of the content of the mural was, and if it was accurate, and if that mattered. The students participated actively in the discussion, clearly drawing upon their training, and raised unanticipated issues that led to a deeper consideration of not just the mural, but of all public art in the library.

Some of the students in the classes were so intrigued with the mural that they volunteered to look more into its history. They wrote up their findings for library administration and prepared background documents that will be preserved in the Special Collections Department. They also provided wording for a plaque for the mural should it be preserved.

## Outcomes

In reflecting on the assignment, Mazak-Kahne felt that the mural lesson enhanced student learning, immersing them in the immediate relationship between public art, public engagement, and institutional memory. She feels that it is important for students to learn that life is messy and that no solution is perfect, while giving them practice in making decisions for the common good, while not dismissing the past. She argues that engagement with this real-world problem helps students gain experience that may help them assess the complicated circumstances that professionals encounter in their field.

Based on this success, Mazak-Kahne intends to build upon this project in the future. IUP's public history program spans multiple courses, and it is often the case that a project started in the Intro class is carried into the archives, museums, oral history, digital history, and family and local history courses. The documentation created during this project will, at the very least, be used to create a digital exhibit that will be housed on the program's website, currently under construction.

Students who worked on the assignment echoed Mazak-Kahne's sentiments. They reported that the mural project gave them insight and hands-on experience that corresponded to their field of interest, public history, and offered them a glimpse into the work often found within museums and archival sites.

They also agreed that the investigation of the mural led them to deepen their understanding of historical research by conducting thorough research into various primary and secondary sources in a manner that an actual public historian would. Although it was challenging, they felt that translating discovered information into an accurate and unique plaque strengthened their ability to communicate historical information effectively and efficiently.

Lorilie Blose, a student in the class, wrote, "Throughout the project, I learned about the meticulous research required to understand art and artifacts, the careful decision of what to preserve, and the significance of accurately documenting and contextualizing historical objects and art. . . . This hands-on experience helped me grasp the intricate workings of these institutions, preparing me for potential future roles in public history." She continued that it "enhanced my academic experience but also gave me invaluable insights into the operational

aspects of public history. Such projects help to bridge the gap between theory and practice, preparing students for careers in history and other related subjects."

## Conclusion

For the immediate future, the mural will continue to grace the walls of the stairway in the older part of the library building, and the students' plaque text will be mounted near it in the stairway. Based on this experience, the curator of the University Museum was inspired to ask interns working at the University Museum the following semester to write descriptions for more of the art items in the library.

The decision of what to do with the historical mural presented a challenge to library personnel. Like most challenges though, it offered opportunities for learning and growth. By including history professors and students as advisors in the discussion-making process, librarian learning was extended, and students and faculty benefited as well.

Jane Carlin and Sha Towers

# The Power of Artists' Books

## Catalysts for Creative Thinking Across the Curriculum

While remote and hybrid learning experiences aren't new to higher education, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, we witnessed a more pervasive presence of these types of learning environments, which came with the potential for higher levels of disengagement among students. Even with in-person synchronous learning experiences, there seems to be a rise of students texting away or glazed over by a preponderance of PowerPoint slides. Students want and need to connect with one another and with course content in meaningful and innovative ways. Teaching and pedagogy literature abounds with examples looking for ways to engage students and create a sense of belonging.

Our advice is to advocate for the use of unique primary resources in the classroom. The use of primary source materials provides students with a hands-on, haptic experience, away from the screen or mobile electronic devices. When students work with primary sources, whether historical or contemporary, they make a connection with the artifact. In this article, we explore our use of one type of primary source material, artists' books, as a tool for student engagement.

## About Artists' Books

If this medium of artists' books is new to you, you're not alone. One of the best definitions comes from the Smithsonian Libraries and Archives. In a blog post about their collection, the authors define an artist's book as:

> A medium of artistic expression that uses the form or function of "book" as inspiration. It is the artistic initiative seen in the illustration, choice of materials, creation process, layout and design that makes it an art object. What truly makes an artist's book is the artist's intent, and artists have used the book as inspiration in a myriad of ways and techniques, from traditional to the experimental.[1]

We might often think of primary sources as old, historical documents from an archive, but artists' books are a type of primary source sharing contemporary voices of artists and writers whose own work is often not part of the traditional scholarly publishing canon. They contribute to the concept of decolonizing traditional library collections by giving voice to often underrepresented communities. Using artists' books can help frame dialogue about difficult issues, reduce tension in the classroom, and serve as catalysts for conversation.

Jane Carlin recently retired as director of the University of Puget Sound Collins Memorial Library, email: carlinjane@gmail.com. Sha Towers is associate dean for research and engagement at Baylor University, email: Sha_Towers@baylor.edu.

Often, we use prompts like the following to begin conversation and exploration:

- What issues of identity are being explored?
- How is the book structured to engage the reader?
- What message is the creator trying to convey about the topic?
- How does the book make you feel about the topic?
- How would you describe the book to someone?

We have found that using prompts like these in the classroom helps provide an inroad for students to engage with these materials, which sometimes can be intimidating. Prompts can also help the student connect and engage with difficult or challenging themes and messages. As one student shared in a follow-up survey, "When using the format of [these] books as an alternative medium to express themes of social justice, it caused me to reflect on how this format is advantageous in causing the reader to be closely attuned to the artists' message."[2]

As librarians, we share a commitment to raising awareness about how artists' books can impact and enhance the student learning experience. These kinds of materials can be used as artifacts to start meaningful discussions and ultimately to change the conversation. Whether at a liberal arts institution like the University of Puget Sound or at an R1 institution like Baylor University, our experiences in using artists' books in the classroom share the common thread of increasing student engagement through reflection and conversation while also raising awareness of the impact of text and image working together to tell a story.

## Artists' Books at Baylor—Sha Towers

Each semester, librarians at Baylor University work with several sections of the Introduction to Art course, with 60 to 100 students in each section of the course. In these sections, we collaborated with professors Katie Larson, Jerolyn Morrison, and Heather White to design transformational educational experiences for students engaging with artists' books. Because of the number of students in these sections, we tend to start with a book fair–style approach in large instructional spaces, incorporating 100 to 150 artists' books at a time. This active learning experience in which students engage directly with the art objects contrasts with the more common, passive experience with intermediary representations of artworks (through textbooks and lecture slides) or even with firsthand experiences, such as art galleries and museums, where artwork is generally only observed visually and not intended to be handled by the viewer.

For these Introduction to Art sessions, we experiment with ways to create greater engagement and make space for students to think about and respond to their experiences. In these large sections, students are divided into small subgroups of five to eight students who rotate through stations, exploring different objects at each station and responding in writing to questions that serve as thinking prompts. Examples of the types of questions used include:

Select an artist's book . . .

- . . . that you find meaningful or that speaks to you and reflect on why.
- . . . and reflect on the message the artist is trying to convey and how they chose to convey that message.
- . . . and discuss ways in which the artist drew on the elements of "book" or the "idea of the book."

Students working in the Baylor University Libraries Arts & Special Collections Research Center Book Arts Collection.

Students working in the Baylor University Libraries Arts & Special Collections Research Center Book Arts Collection.

- . . . that challenged you or that you had trouble relating to (content, delivery, material, or other reasons) and discuss.

Providing all the questions in writing ahead of time had the unanticipated result of signaling to some students that the primary objective was the completion of the assignment—i.e., answering all the questions as promptly as possible, rather than the intended focus on exploration of the objects (and thus greater exposure to a wider variety of artistic interpretations and approaches to conveying the artist's message). More recently, we've provided the students with a clipboard, pencil, and a blank sheet of paper with only numbers (representing the questions) and spaces marked out for written responses to questions that are revealed at specific intervals after students have had time to explore the artists' books. We display each question as it's revealed either on projection screens throughout the instruction space, on giant Post-Its placed around the room, on mobile whiteboards, and/or reading the questions aloud. We often invite students to share with the entire class a response either to something they've written about or other prompts such as "tell us about an artist's book that you found really challenging or inspiring."

In some variants of this experience, we ask the students in their small groups to work together on a response to writing prompts such as:

> What has changed about your initial definitions or assumptions about artists' books? What have you learned about artists' books? How do these books change your perception of what can be considered art?
>
> Your response should be at least 300 words and reflect on the group's discussion.

In other variants, we've had groups select one artist's book that they've explored and create memes or TikTok style videos that capture or reflect their experience with that work.

Artists' books can also be used successfully to support and enhance non-arts courses, such as history, literature, sociology, social work, and medical humanities. For example, at Baylor, in a history course discussing the Atlantic slave trade, we introduced the students to several artists' books that dealt with this topic in various ways, many of which had drawn on archival collections and primary sources as their inspiration. In literature courses, we've

used artists' books to showcase ways in which artists bring new approaches and insights to literary texts through various methods of printing and text design, combining with other art forms, and creative presentation. In medical humanities courses, artists' books explore artistic representation of the human condition and human expression, science, life, and mortality, providing an opportunity to pause and reflect on the complex layers of human interaction and emotion in the profession.

One example of this kind of collaboration is a partnership with history professor Felipe Hinojosa and his course on the Chicano Movement taking place during the spring 2024 term. As part of this course, students visited the book arts collection to explore work by Latinx artists and Latinx experience. Students also learned about zines, a "cousin of the artist's book," as a medium for contemporary, democratized dissemination, and expression.[3]

Students then visited the library's makerspace to learn about materials, tools, design elements, and resources for creating their own zines about important figures and movements of the Chicano Movement. Over the course of the semester, students will meet with their subject librarian to learn about relevant resources for their background research and with experiential learning team members for zine-making workshops. At the completion of the project, we are inviting students to submit copies of their zines for inclusion in the library's book arts collection and to create an exhibit in the library about the students' research process, use of special collections resources, and their zines as creative manifestations of their scholarship.

## Artists' Books at the University of Puget Sound—Jane Carlin

Artists' books can also serve as a medium to explore new ways of understanding and learning through collaboration. One such example is the exhibition "Science Stories," a unique project that brought together Pacific Northwest scientists and book artists that resulted in the creation of engaging and unique artists' books that offer new ways to interpret science and to tell a story. The curatorial team was composed of Peter Wimberger, director of the Museum of Natural History at the University of Puget Sound; Lucia Harrison, retired professor of art from The Evergreen State College and board member of the Puget Sound Book Artists; and Jane Carlin, then-library director at Puget Sound.

Materials in the University of Puget Sound Collins Library Book Arts Studio.

Local artists whose work represented a strong connection with science and the environment were invited to participate and work with area scientists from The Evergreen State College, the University of Puget Sound, the University of Washington, Washington State University, the National Park Service, and Tacoma Public Utilities. In January 2020, just before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, artists, scientists, and curators met together at the University of Puget Sound Museum of Natural History for a "speed dating" event that provided the opportunity for participants to learn about the scientific research in our community. The artists and scientists rotated throughout the afternoon, learning from one another about their art and research and artifacts from the museum. As a result of this event, pairs were formed to

Puget Sound students working in the Book Arts Studio.


Puget Sound students working in the Book Arts Studio.

work together, and in addition, a few individual artists opted to work with an artifact from the museum on their own.

The principal goal of this project was to expand awareness of the scientific research and work being done in our local community and to provide a new way to raise awareness of their work and make the research more accessible to a broader audience. COVID-19 required us to modify our exhibition plans, but it also provided the opportunity to create a robust educational website that is available to the public. The exhibition website[4] offers short videos from both the artist and the scientist as well as local resources. This exhibit also traveled to local venues, as well as Whitman College and The Evergreen State College.

A similar approach was used to coordinate the exhibition "Changing the Conversation," which was held at the University of Puget Sound Collins Memorial Library and featured books that reflect social justice issues. Two members of the public were invited to serve as co-curators, along with librarians MalPina Chan, whose work reflects the Chinese American experience, and Carletta Carrington Wilson, an African American poet and fiber artist. The goal of the exhibition was to showcase how artists' books can help change the conversation by promoting discussion about difficult issues and learning from personal narratives and stories of the artists who created them.

A final collaborative project designed to engage students and the community focused on the use of institutional archives as a source of inspiration as well as an opportunity to enhance library collections. Artists from the Tacoma community were invited to produce a bespoke artists' book or work on paper that reflected the legacy of local artist and advocate Abby Williams Hill.[5] Artists spent time examining sketchbooks, photos, diaries, and images produced by Hill as inspiration in developing a response to her life. These books were part of an exhibition titled "The World through Abby's Eyes," which also included original source material. As part of the exhibition, the library sponsored an event on International Women's Day to showcase the work and encourage the university community to consider the influence of the artist and the changing social and cultural norms associated with women and social issues.

Additionally, Collins Library, in collaboration with many local book artists, offers an Introduction to Book Arts credit class that meets weekly for 90 minutes. In this class, students learn about special collections, letterpress printing, basic book design, and binding and have the opportunity to create their own books. Working with local artists offers a great

opportunity to collaborate and reduce the workload for library personnel. This class offers students—many with packed course schedules—a chance to explore their creative side in a less rigorous academic setting.

A course or assignment like this where students create their own artists' book offers a creative experience that is far more engaging than the standard research paper, although it still requires research and planning. An added benefit is that, in turn, campus libraries may exhibit such work, potentially adding such creative works of scholarship to their collections and including them in institutional repositories. Such paths offer students an important way to actively participate in the scholarly conversation along with highlighting them as authors and creators beyond the confines of the classroom and course assignments. These creative works can also serve as inspiration for future generations of students as they showcase the value of student research and creative works.

## Conclusion

Artists' books in the classroom—and really in any setting where people can engage with them—provide rich opportunities to explore artistic expression and commentary. We are called to engage kinesthetically in this art, and through the works of these artists, we are called to be active participants in the unfolding of their voices and messages. Just as these artists challenge our notion of art and book, they also challenge us to think in new ways about ourselves and our world.

We encourage you to connect with your special collections librarians and explore what resources are available at your institution. If your institution does not have a collection, start one. You can also browse the sites of the College Book Arts Association (https://www.collegebookart.org/) as well as dealers' websites such as Vamp and Tramp, Booksellers (http://www.vampandtramp.com/); 23 Sandy (https://23sandy.com/); and Abecedarian Artists' Books (https://abecedariangallery.com/) to learn more.

## Notes

1. Smithsonian Libraries and Archives, "What Is an Artist's Book?" *UnBound* (blog), https://blog.library.si.edu/blog/2012/06/01/what-is-an-artists-book/#.X5so4YhKg2w.
2. Jane Carlin, "Changing the Conversation: Artists' Books, Zines and Broadsides from the Collins Memorial Library Collection," Sound Ideas, Collins Library, University of Puget Sound, 2022, 40–41, https://soundideas.pugetsound.edu/faculty_pubs_library/1/.
3. The University of Texas at Austin's online library guide describes zines this way: "Commonly a small circulation publication of original or appropriated texts and images. More broadly, the term encompasses any self-published unique work of minority interest" with "roots in the informal, underground publications that focused on social and political activism in the '60s." "Zines at the UT Libraries," University of Texas Libraries, last updated September 8, 2023, https://guides.lib.utexas.edu/zines.
4. The University of Puget Sound, "Science Stories: A Collaboration of Book Artists and Scientists," accessed March 29, 2024, https://blogs.pugetsound.edu/sciencestories/.
5. Recommended related websites: "Digital Teaching Kit: Abby Williams Hill–Artist and Advocate," https://library.pugetsound.edu/DTC-AbbyWilliamsHill; "Abby Williams Hill Collection–University of Puget Sound," https://library.pugetsound.edu/awh.

Jodi Allison-Bunnell

# The Puzzle of Large-Scale Digital Collections

## Have We Reached an Inflection Point?

Since the debut of digital collections[1] from libraries, archives, and other cultural heritage institutions in the mid-1990s, we've searched for solutions to make those collections easily available to researchers. Aggregations and subject-based portals emerged as part of those solutions, with enthusiastic support from federal granting agencies, states, and foundations. Some (California Digital Library, Mountain West Digital Library) have adapted and persisted over time, some are present but less robust (Western Waters), and others are long gone (Colorado Digitization Program, Washington Women's Heritage). After a quarter-century of investment in digital collections at and across institutions in the United States, we clearly struggle to find sustainable and effective solutions. It's a fiendishly difficult problem in the absence of other options, such as a federally supported national digital collections program. Significantly, the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) announced publicly on April 3, 2024, that it was seeking a new organizational home for its cultural heritage aggregation program after concluding that it could not sustain the program in its current form.[2] With this announcement, and the debut last summer of JSTOR's Shared Collections, it's useful to reflect on whether this new service represents a significant progression in this space, or if it's more likely that any cultural heritage aggregation in the United States will continue to struggle.[3]

Shared Collections allows institutions either to have JSTOR harvest their digital collections of documents, photos, and other special collections from a local Digital Asset Management System, or to create and share those same collections through JSTOR's collection management tool.[4] The cost for either harvesting or hosting is modest, but participants can also add other services.

In some ways, Shared Collections looks a lot like the DPLA. Both aggregate unique digital content from libraries, archives, and museums across America. Founded in 2013, DPLA currently includes almost 50 million photographs, documents, and audio and video recordings from a wide spectrum of contributing institutions, from the smallest historical societies to the Library of Congress and many portions of the Smithsonian Institution.[5] DPLA has been an important part of efforts to develop access to digital collections. Its network of state and regional hubs, many of which are supported by Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funds from the Institute for Museum and Library Services, provide essential infrastructure, training, and communities of practice for far-flung practitioners.

DPLA has also struggled with three key issues: financial stability, metadata inconsistency, and raison d'etre. To determine if Shared Collections represents a significant advance, it's useful to compare the two offerings on these issues.

Jodi Allison-Bunnell is head of Archives and Special Collections and senior archivist at the Montana State University Library, email: jodi.allisonbunnell@montana.edu.

Funded largely by grants from its inception, DPLA has struggled to transition to more sustainable funding. It received about $7 million from federal granting agencies between 2014 and 2018, plus significant grants from major foundations over the full ten years of its existence.[6] Since then, additional foundation funding and a re-focus on ebooks, along with a fee-based model for its hubs, has kept its cultural heritage aggregation afloat. But not by very much. I calculated from a review of DPLA's forms 990 that the hub fees cover only about 13% of its operating costs. Also, not all hubs have been unable to continue annual fees or have chosen not to do so.[7] Without more support from participating institutions or other sources, this is obviously unsustainable. Over five years ago, Roger Schonfeld of Ithaka S + R posited that it may have been a mistake for DPLA to try and exist as a standalone organization.[8] That DPLA itself has concluded this and launched a search for a new home suggests that his statement was correct.

JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a financially stable organization that also maintains Artstor, Portico, and Ithaka S + R, its research operation.[9] The organization has a long history of developing cost distribution models to sustain its services. Those models are used to determine cost distribution for other services in libraries and archives, including ArchivesSpace (which is, in turn, one of the few sustainability success stories in the cultural heritage sector). In its presentations on the financial model for Shared Collections, JSTOR predicted that after a start-up phase of major development and promoting adoption, the program would reach a financial break-even point in about 2025. By being part of an established organization, Shared Collections also has lower overhead costs. There's another advantage to a JSTOR service that I observed in over a decade at a regional academic library consortium: an addition to a bill from an existing vendor or partnership is more easily supported by a resource allocator than one coming from a new or unfamiliar organization.

The inconsistent metadata for digital collections presents the second major challenge for any aggregator. With standards like Dublin Core (a lowest-common-denominator but very accessible metadata scheme), a passion for institution-specific branding and customization, and few or no systems that encourage standards-compliant metadata, digital collections inevitably have a mass of metadata that does not gracefully co-mingle in a shared search and retrieval system. DPLA has some minimal requirements for metadata ingested through its system of hubs.[10] Despite those requirements, DPLA has faced many challenges with metadata consistency that have required remediation either at the originating institutions, at the hubs, or at DPLA central.

As part of facing those challenges, DPLA has had significant success in advancing the cause of consistency and standards compliance. The organization's work on standardized rights statements has been quite transformative. That work, led in the United States by Emily Gore, was a response to the mind-bending variation in the Dublin Core Rights field. As DPLA worked with Europeana and other partners, they identified more than 87,000 unique rights statements in the Rights field in DPLA, most of which were confusing, inaccurate, or not about rights at all.[11] This is a prime example of what only becomes evident in aggregations! Implementing standardized rights statements has been groundbreaking, difficult, and immensely important. From my experience leading the work to develop two hubs for the Northwest, the work on standardized rights statements motivated us to develop and deliver training on determining copyright status that made the task approachable for even the smallest institutions.[12] Ultimately, the leadership that DPLA has exercised on this and many other problems in this space are of lasting importance.[13]

Can JSTOR overcome issues of metadata inconsistency? It's possible that they might in an organization with robust technical capabilities, over 200 employees, and with the promise of artificial intelligence (AI) tools.[14] JSTOR is beginning Shared Collections only requiring a Resource Type in contributed metadata. It offers participating institutions guidelines that strongly encourage nine other fields and make the impact of institutional decisions on search clear.[15] When I first read these ultra-light requirements, I was concerned that the absence of requirements would replicate the same issues that DPLA has faced. JSTOR is considering making copies of submitted metadata and enhancing them with AI tools. Current work focuses on identities and keywords but will include other properties in the future. The original records would not be modified, but the search infrastructure could work primarily with the enhanced records that have the regularity that the originals may lack.[16] This approach—which both overcomes the limitations of inconsistent metadata and also applies AI tools at a scale not possible for many institutions—could be a significant advance in this field if JSTOR is able to implement it.

JSTOR and DPLA have different positions in the information landscape. JSTOR is a destination site for millions of academic researchers from high school upward who depend on it for resources that are otherwise inaccessible to them. (According to Bruce Heterick, Senior Vice President, Open Collections & Infrastructure at ITHAKA, JSTOR is consistently among the top three used sites in the academic libraries he has visited over the course of his career.) Making unique materials available alongside published materials allows "accidental" discovery of unique materials that may enrich a project or inquiry but that the researcher didn't think to search for specifically. DPLA promised to be a destination site as well. Many hoped for that outcome, but also questioned whether their infrastructure could really deliver that.[17] DPLA is certainly a destination for K-12 teachers who use its well-curated Primary Source Sets, of selected sources from DPLA and others with a teaching guide. With its commitment to shareable metadata, DPLA was also originally designed to be a platform for building apps—a promise that didn't pan out. (Though who can forget the Historical Cats app.)

Last, the technical model for each organization is significantly different. When it was created, DPLA decided to harvest metadata from a system of state and regional hubs and a few very large institutions, and to not host the digital objects themselves. In doing so, they avoided the need to build a national-level digital asset management system and established a network of local and regional sources for training, support, and infrastructure. That was a brilliant decision in many ways: The hubs structure kept DPLA from having to manage relationships with hundreds of contributing institutions. But as search engines evolved, that decision came to negatively affect harvesting and indexing by search engines. Search engines have little interest in metadata-only records; they want to deliver their customers directly to digital objects. In 2021, Montana State University partnered with DPLA to determine if, by hosting display objects, DPLA could improve search engine rankings.[18] The results were a clear "yes," as reported by Kenning Arlitsch and Michael Della Bitta at the Council for Networked Information meeting in 2021.[19] Making that move, however, would have been a fundamental shift in DPLA's technical and governance infrastructure. With a strong tradition of institutional control over digital cultural heritage, giving up that control by having traffic directed away from the institution—even with increased ease for researchers—was untenable when DPLA was created and may remain so.

Shared Collections either harvests or hosts the original objects from each collection. As expected from Arlitsch and Della Bitta's research—and admittedly based on a review of my institution's collections only—the search results from Shared Collections are very highly ranked (even above those of our locally hosted collections where we have taken great pains with search engine optimization).

While Shared Collections appears to represent a significant advance, the jury will be out for some time. The fundamental issues facing DPLA and Shared Collections are simply difficult, and the struggles with them have little or nothing to do with the skills or intentions of the capable people of both organizations. It is both a tough economic problem and an outcome of what we might call "rugged individualism in heritage collections": while shared descriptive efforts have been in place for books for more than a century, many standards for heritage collections have emerged since 2000. It's a symptom of under-investment in cultural heritage in the United States. We may look with admiration at Europeana, Trove, and the national libraries of Europe, which exist because there is national (and in the case of Europeana, multi-national), centralized, and sustained investment in cultural heritage. In the United States, we are left with much more piecemeal efforts that leave organizations struggling from the very bottom (small historical societies and public libraries) to the top (national-level aggregations). In in cultural heritage work, we have a bad habit of focusing overmuch on local customization, functionality, and appearance while working with metadata. Any efforts to combat that are an advance in the cause of making digital collections genuinely discoverable.

So, let's hope that JSTOR is onto something great. Let's hope that all the good that DPLA has done can be sustained by finding an organization that is able to take on its mission financially and technically.[20] Let's hope that other major efforts to aggregate cultural heritage (the National Finding Aid Network and Social Networks and Archival Context are the most important ones) can be sustained. The US desperately needs a national-level infrastructure and approach to digital collections and cultural heritage, and we can all be grateful for and supportive of the efforts of all the organizations and individuals who are working to make that a reality.

## Notes

1. I am using the term "digital collection" in the sense of the definition "a logical grouping of related digital content that is organized by collection-level metadata. All digital content items (digitized and born digital) are capable of existing within a digital collection." Library of Congress, Digital Collections Management Compendium, Glossary, accessed December 8, 2023, https://www.loc.gov/programs/digital-collections-management/about-this-program/glossary/.

2. Dominic Byrd-McDevitt, "Applications Open to Find a New Home for America's Digital Heritage," Digital Public Library of America, April 3, 2024, https://dp.la/news/applications-open-now-a-new-home-for-americas-digital-heritage?mc_cid=0a71256a7e&mc_eid=0e17877a45.

3. JSTOR, "Amplify the Reach of Your Collections with JSTOR," accessed April 5, 2024, https://about.jstor.org/whats-in-jstor/infrastructure/share/.

4. JSTOR, "Why Share Your Content with Collection Loader?," accessed April 5, 2024, https://about.jstor.org/l/load/.

5. According to the Digital Public Library of America, https://dp.la/, accessed April 5, 2024.

6. J. Allison-Bunnell, "Finding Aid Aggregation at a Crossroads," UC Office of the President: California Digital Library, 2019, https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5sp13112.

7. Jodi Allison-Bunnell, "Finding Aid Aggregation: Toward a Robust Future," *The American Archivist* 85, no. 2 (2022): 556–86, https://scholarworks.montana.edu/xmlui/handle/1/17556. An example of a hub that has been unable to pay fees is the California Digital Library; the Big Sky Country Digital Network decided to withdraw in 2021 because the value proposition for the hub fee was insufficient.

8. Roger Schonfeld, "Learning Lessons from DPLA," *The Scholarly Kitchen*, November 13, 2018, https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2018/11/13/learning-lessons-from-dpla/.

9. ITHAKA, "What We Do," accessed April 5, 2024, https://www.ithaka.org/#what-we-do.

10. Its required properties are a title, URL, data provider, and rights statement. It encourages use of nine other properties and includes controlled vocabularies and authority sources in the appendixes. Digital Public Library of America, Metadata Application Profile v. 5.0, December 7, 2017, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fJEWhnYy5Ch7_ef_-V48-FAViA72OieG/view?usp=sharing.

11. Mark Matienzo, "Rights Statements in Digital Object Aggregators," Digital Library Federation Forum, October 28, 2018, https://matienzo.org/storage/2014/2014Oct-DLF-Rights.pdf.

12. Northwest Digital Heritage, which serves organizations in Washington and Oregon, and the Orbis Cascade Alliance's hub (which the organization decided not to maintain).

13. The author serves as co-chair of the Rights Statements Working Group of DPLA, which is currently working on issues around indigenous materials.

14. JSTOR LinkedIn profile, accessed April 5, 2024, https://www.linkedin.com/company/jstor/about/.

15. "Guide to JSTOR Search for Shared Collections Contributors," https://support.contributors.jstor.org/hc/en-us/articles/360058878154-Guide-to-JSTOR-Search-for-Shared-Collections-Contributors; Shared Collections Metadata, https://support.contributors.jstor.org/hc/en-us/articles/360044658434-Shared-Collections-Metadata. The nine "strongly recommended" fields are identifier, title, contributor, date(s), description, subject(s), rights/license, holding institution, and canonical URL.

16. Paraphrased from conversation between Bruce Heterick and the author, January 5, 2024; information enhanced from conversation between Jason Przbylski and Lenny Adler (both of JSTOR) and the author, April 23, 2024.

17. See Kenning Arlitsch and Patrick O'Brien, "Our Relationship with Internet Search Engines," Re:Thinking, Council on Library and Information Resources, March 21, 2013, https://www.clir.org/2013/03/our-relationship-with-internet-search-engines.

18. Michael Della Bitta, "Improving Access and Discovery," DPLA News, January 29, 2021, https://dp.la/news/improving-access-and-discovery.

19. Kenning Arlitsch and Michael Della Bitta, "Is It Time to Give the Digital Public Library of America Our Digital Objects?," CNI Fall 2021 Project Briefings, last updated July 25, 2022, https://www.cni.org/topics/special-collections/is-it-time-to-give-the-digital-public-library-of-america-our-digital-objects.

20. Digital Public Library of America, "Applications Open to Find a New Home for America's Digital Heritage," accessed April 5, 2024, http://dpla.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/EOI-FAQ-4.2.24.pdf?mc_cid=0a71256a7e&mc_eid=0e17877a45.

**Eudora Welty Digital Archives.** *Access:* https://da.mdah.ms.gov/series/welty.

The Eudora Welty Digital Archives is sponsored by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH). It contains "drafts, revised copies, and printer's versions of Welty's works, including stories, books, essays, reviews, lectures, speeches, and drama," as well as correspondence, photographs, and video/audio recordings. Welty began donating material to the MDAH in 1957, when she identified it as her preferred archive. The Welty portion of MDAH is divided into four sections: correspondence, manuscripts, photos, and other. The manuscripts include Welty's handwritten notes on her short stories, novels, and lectures. The photos are of her, her family, her travels, and Mississippi. The "other" consists of several videos of Welty reading and commenting on her works.

Much of the content relates to Eudora Welty the writer rather than her works. Even the manuscripts provide insight into her thought process. The website's difficulty is with its formatting. The manuscripts are watermarked throughout, so one must maximize the manuscript page and zoom in to see the written text. Even pages without handwriting are covered with the watermark to the point of being difficult to read. The photos are the worst example of extreme watermarking. Photos are so obnoxiously watermarked that it is very difficult to see details or use them for any purpose other than curiosity. In reviewing MDAH's other collections, they do not seem to be as heavily watermarked (or watermarked at all) as the Welty collection.

While the website may fill some research needs, MDAH does itself a disservice presenting the material as it does. The website is difficult to navigate, and the collection's search box is hidden as a gray box on a gray bar with light gray writing. A scholar would have to travel to the MDAH to see the original documents and photos rather than relying on high-quality scanned editions. Isn't the point of digital archives to bring material to a wider population? Researching Eudora Welty on this site requires myopia and fortitude.—*Delores Carlito, University of Alabama at Birmingham, dcarlito@uab.edu*

**Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment.** *Access:* https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/.

The Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment is a multidisciplinary research institute under the London School of Economics and Political Science, which focuses on research and policy related to climate change and the environment. The institute works toward a vision for "a sustainable, inclusive and resilient world" through research, education, and promoting informed policy decision-making. Their website hosts a strong collection of related resources in a variety of formats. A portion of resources are original to the institute's website, while others are authored by Institute staff or affiliates but aggregated from external journals and news sources.

The website's content is navigable from the tabbed menu at the top of the page as well as through a site search. There are three main approaches to browsing. One is to use the tabs associated with specific information formats in the upper menu: "Publications" for policy

Joni R. Roberts is associate university librarian for public services and collection development at Willamette University, email: jroberts@willamette.edu, and Carol A. Drost is associate university librarian for technical services at Willamette University, email: cdrost@willamette.edu.

white papers and research articles; "Explainers" for basic information for a general audience, similar to encyclopedia entries; "News & commentaries" for press releases, news articles, and commentaries; and "Events" for links to register for or view past in person and online lectures or workshops.

The second approach to browsing the institute's website is to use the "Research areas" menu tab, which allows readers to navigate to landing pages curated around 13 environmental subject areas. Research area pages provide a brief description of their subject coverage and links to related resources, including Institute research projects and data, publications, news, "explainers," and a list of institute staff affiliated with the given subject area. Browsing is also possible using the "People" tab in the upper menu to navigate web content by individual authors. Institute staff member pages feature a brief biography and list of publications. Information on the website is also indexed by research areas and keywords.

Overall, the institute's website provides a simple starting place for inquiries related to climate change and environmental research and policy information. With a range of publications from general level "explainers" to scholarly research articles, the website is likely to be useful for students, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. Of particular note, the institute's original policy white papers are unique practical resources that are unlikely to be indexed by most library catalogs and literature databases.—*Amy Jankowski, University of New Mexico, ajankowski@unm.edu*

**Global Health Observatory.** *Access:* https://www.who.int/data/gho.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is an agency of the United Nations working "to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable." One of WHO's many functions is to monitor and assess health trends among its 194 member states. In doing so, WHO produces and compiles data on priority health topics and indicators. The data collected by WHO is publicly available through a data repository, the Global Health Observatory.

The Global Health Observatory website can be searched using the "Data Search" feature, or browsed by sections: "Indicators," "Countries," "Data API," "Map Gallery," and "Publications." "Indicators" and "Countries" are the two main sections of the website.

The "Indicators" section collates datasets related to the main health indictors monitored by WHO. For example, clicking on the health indicator "Oral Health" opens a list of related topics. Clicking on the first result in the list, "Affordability of fluoride toothpaste," opens a table of country names and lists whether fluoride toothpaste is affordable or unaffordable in each location. The data in this table can be filtered within the table and downloaded in CSV, PNG, or JPEG formats.

The "Countries" section is an alphabetical list of countries, each linking to a health data overview. Each country's overview page compiles graphs related to the country's population, average life expectancy, leading causes of death, and more. The graphs are clear and colorful, and many are interactive. All data sources are linked and can be downloaded for further use.

The "Data API" section provides two options for querying WHO's data: OData (Open Data Protocol) and Athena API. Instructions are provided for both API options. The "Map Gallery" section is a large collection of maps on major health topics. Maps are first browsed by topic and then can be narrowed to country, if country-level data are available for the topic. The "Publications" section provides access to reports on health trends and situations, the

annual World Health Statistics reports, statistical reports from WHO programs (by health topic), and more. All publications are available for download.

The Global Health Observatory is a fascinating portal for worldwide health data. The maps, graphs, and tables, though occasionally slow to load over highspeed internet, are visually compelling and easy to manipulate or filter on the website. This resource is essential for locating country -level health data and for researching and monitoring health indicators.—*Emily Hamstra, Network of the National Library of Medicine, Region 5, ehamstra@uw.edu*

## Acquisitions

Photograph of H. H. Kung (Atlantic Photo, Berlin-SW), between 1933 and 1937.

The papers of H. H. Kung 孔祥熙 are now fully digitized and accessible for the first time via the Hoover Institution Library & Archives Digital Collections. Kung served in several high-ranking positions in the Kuomintang (KMT), such as the minister of finance, governor of the Bank of China, and as premier of the Executive Yuan throughout the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) era, a period of intense struggle for the early Republic of China. These roles, along with his intimate relationships with influential figures such as Chiang Kai-shek, Sun Yat-sen, and the powerful Soong family, make this collection an invaluable asset in understanding the history of modern China and Taiwan.

The Kung papers have undergone an impressive journey since they arrived at the Hoover Institution Library & Archives in 2006. Mold and water damage hindered access to the frail materials contained in this significant collection. For over a decade, approximately half the materials were available to researchers but only via microfilm in the Library & Archives Reading Room. Now, with full-text searching enabled for both typewritten and printed text in English and Chinese, the Library & Archives' digitization of the H. H. Kung papers has ushered in a new era of research possibilities for scholars of modern China and Taiwan. Learn more at https://www.hoover.org/news/open-research-h-h-kung-papers-now-available-digitally.

A partnership between the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's University Libraries and the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) will create an online searchable public depository of roughly 4 million internal documents from the state of North Carolina's $47.8 million settlement with electronic cigarette maker Juul Labs. In 2021, North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein reached a settlement with Juul Labs over its alleged marketing to teens, which fueled a surge in teen vaping. The two-year lawsuit uncovered internal documents from Juul Labs that offer insight into the company's strategy and practices. The documents date from 2015 through 2019 and contain a wide range of records, including business correspondence, reports, marketing plans, advertisements, sales data, internal research, and multimedia files. As part of the settlement, Juul Labs is required to make public many of these documents. The first 280,000 documents are now available online as part of the UCSF Industry Documents Library at https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/tobacco/collections/juul-labs-collection/. UNC-Chapel Hill and UCSF will publish the remaining documents monthly, concluding the project in 2025.

The University of Arizona Libraries Special Collections has received a sizable trove of material related to the USS Arizona from the family of a sailor who served aboard the battleship prior to the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. Lowell and Wendy Franklin of Hobart, Wisconsin, discovered the mementos earlier this year in a box with the name of Lowell's father, Arthur, on it that they had stored in their basement since receiving it from the estate of Lowell's late older brother. Inside, they found dozens of items: photos, scrapbooks, handbooks, and other official documents, plus official and personal correspondence, newsletters, and other memorabilia, such as the ship's newspaper, menus, and event programs.

The university holds one of the largest collections of USS Arizona materials in the world, with more than 100 boxes of material containing hundreds of thousands of materials, including photographs, newspapers, correspondence, and other documents that help tell the story of the ship and the men who served on it. The collection even includes a steel girder salvaged from a scrapyard, much like the battleship's bell, which has held a place of honor at the university for decades—it now hangs in the Student Union clock tower. Learn more at https://news.arizona.edu/story/trove-uss-arizona-memorabilia-donated-university-libraries.