

College & Research Libraries

news

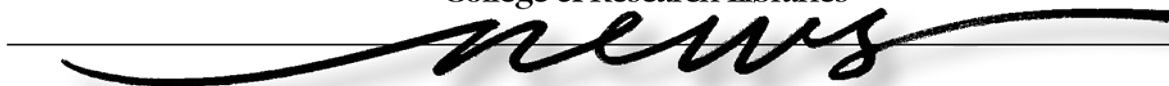
Association of College & Research Libraries



Trevor A. Dawes

*ACRL's 2026
Academic/Research
Librarian of the Year*

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Trevor A. Dawes, vice provost for libraries and museums and May Morris University Librarian at the University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press, is the 2026 ACRL Academic/Research Librarian of the Year. Dawes exemplifies excellence in academic and research librarianship through his leadership, service, scholarship, and passion for the profession. Dawes has an extensive record of service to ALA/ACRL and the profession, including serving as ACRL president, a member of the ALA Executive Board, and president of the Association of Research Libraries. An author and presenter, Dawes has written or edited books, chapters, and articles, and has presented at local, national, and international conferences. His publications include work on leadership in academic libraries, diversity, and organizational development.

Learn more about Dawes and ACRL's other award recipients in this issue.

Editor-in-chief: David Free

Recruitment ad sales manager: David M. Connolly

C&RL News Editorial Board: José A. Aguiñaga (Chair), Maya Riley Banks, Jennie M. Burroughs, Jessica Epstein, Kelly Karst, Natalie Eloisa Marquez, Kapil Vasudev, Michelle Demeter (C&RL Editor), Teresa Anderson (ACRL Executive Director), David Free (Editor-in-Chief), Anna Simonson (ACRL Publications Committee Chair), Leo S. Lo (ACRL Past-President)

Editorial offices: (312) 280-2513

Email: dfree@ala.org

Website: crln.acrl.org

Product advertising: Contact Melissa Carr, sales manager (US East, South, West, International), 704-491-7789, or Ryan King, sales manager (US Midwest: IL, IN, MI, WI), 773-414-9292.

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ACRL Board of Directors: President—Brad L. Warren; vice-president/president-elect—Alexia Hudson-Ward; past-president—Leo S. Lo; Budget & Finance Committee chair—Joe Mocnik; councilor—Millie Gonzalez; directors-at-large—Tarida Anantachai, Kimberley Bugg, Walter Butler, Amy Dye-Reeves, Andrea M. Falcone, Carrie Forbes, Rachel M. Minkin, Rebecca Miller Waltz; ACRL Executive Director—Teresa Anderson

Library of Virginia Joins ASERL

The Library of Virginia has been approved as the newest member of the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL), a significant opportunity that expands Virginia's role in one of the nation's most active regional research library consortia. The announcement follows a vote of ASERL's membership at its fall 2025 meeting, where the organization welcomed the Library of Virginia into its growing community of research institutions. Founded in 1956, ASERL brings together leading research libraries across the Southeast to advance shared goals in resource sharing, professional development, and collaborative innovation. With the addition of the Library of Virginia, the consortium now includes more than three dozen institutions committed to expanding access to knowledge and improving services for researchers, students, and the public.

The Library of Virginia serves as the Commonwealth's library and archives, preserving more than 134 million collection items and supporting libraries, researchers, educators, and the public statewide. Membership in ASERL will further extend the library's ability to collaborate regionally and contribute to national conversations about library innovation.

GPO Appoints New Depository Library Council Members

US Government Publishing Office (GPO) Director Hugh Nathaniel Halpern, on the agency's 165th birthday, has appointed six new members to the Depository Library Council (DLC). The DLC has advised the GPO Director on policy matters relating to the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) and access to US Government information for more than 50 years. In addition to experience working in various types of libraries, the new DLC members have experience with and knowledge of current developments in library science and US Government information.

The new members are Brent Abercrombie, regional coordinator and reference librarian at the Indiana State Library; Andie Craley, technical services and government information librarian and depository coordinator at the Harford Community College Library; Ashley S. Dees, associate head of research and instruction services and associate professor at the University of Mississippi Libraries; Dominique Hallett, government information and STEM librarian at the Arkansas State University Dean B. Ellis Library; Antoine McGrath, FDLP coordinator and manager of open library at the Internet Archive Library; and Joe Mocnik, professor and senior advisor at the Kansas State University Hale Library. These new members will help position the DLC and the FDLP to advance GPO's vision of an America informed.

New from ACRL – Inclusive Leadership in Academic Libraries

ACRL announces the publication of *Inclusive Leadership in Academic Libraries*, edited by Annie Bélanger, Jennifer A. DeVito, and John J. Meier. This collection explores what inclusive leadership is, the theories underlying it, and ways to incorporate it into your daily work.

Libraries are forever in a state of change and evolution. We are affected by social movements, cultural norms, the political climate, and economic forces. Developing skills in inclusive leadership is one step toward fostering workspaces that are diverse, equitable, and able to effectively manage through change while holding true to our values as library colleagues.

Inclusive Leadership in Academic Libraries offers twenty-six chapters in three parts designed to help you develop these skills.

- **Setting the Stage:** Introduces inclusive leadership and theoretical frameworks
- **Concepts and Practices:** Includes chapters on the themes and theories of inclusive leadership and case studies demonstrating them
- **Living into Inclusive Leadership:** Puts inclusive leadership into practice and offers examples of how it's been done in various academic libraries

Inclusive leadership incorporates empathy, acknowledges that every person brings different perspectives and skills to the workplace, and articulates that leaders exist at all levels. *Inclusive Leadership in Academic Libraries* will help you incorporate effective, equitable practices throughout your library. This book is also available as an open access edition.

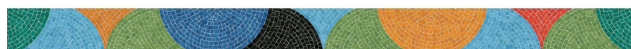
Inclusive Leadership in Academic Libraries is available for purchase in print through the ALA Online Store and Amazon.com; via EBSCO, ProQuest, and other ebook vendors; and by telephone order at (866) 746-7252 in the United States or (770) 442-8633 for international customers.

edited by **Annie Bélanger, Jennifer A. DeVito,**
and **John J. Meier**



INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

in Academic Libraries



Subscribe to Open Meets Sustainability Threshold

Project MUSE recently announced that it has met its sustainability threshold for another year of Subscribe to Open (S2O). As a result, current content from more than one hundred journals across twenty-eight publishers will be available open access on the Project MUSE platform for a second year in 2026. Project MUSE is deeply grateful to its partnering libraries and institutions worldwide, as well as the S2O Community of Practice, for their commitment to ensuring vital humanities and social science scholarship is accessible to everyone. S2O is an equitable open access model for scholarly journals that enables subscription journals to open access to their current content without article processing charges. Learn more about S2O at <https://about.muse.jhu.edu/subscribe-to-open/S2O>.

Bloomsbury Open Collections Adds Titles

Bloomsbury has announced that Bloomsbury Open Collections has reached 48% of its funding goal globally for 2025–26, ensuring a further twenty-nine titles are added. This builds on the initial thirty-four titles that have been published open access in the first two years of the program. Bloomsbury Open Collections is part of Bloomsbury's wider open access offering, which sees the publisher release well over one hundred open access books each year. Pioneering an alternative to traditional open access models, which typically rely on an

individual or their funder or institution paying a fee (or book processing charge) to cover the costs of publishing, Bloomsbury Open Collections' equity-led approach spreads the cost across multiple institutions. Bloomsbury was the first commercial publisher to pilot such a model and, following the successful launch of the pilot program in 2023, expanded the range of disciplines offered in 2024. As Bloomsbury enters its fourth year of Bloomsbury Open Collections, the program showcases the potential sustainability and resilience of collective-action open access models. More details are available at <https://www.bloomsbury.com/discover/bloomsbury-academic/open-access/bloomsbury-open-collections/>.

CACTUS, Taylor & Francis Renew Partnership

Cactus Communications (CACTUS) and Taylor & Francis have announced the renewal of their partnership, which provides tailored language support to journal authors. Language quality plays a critical role in the peer-review process. Poorly written submissions can impact reviewers' understanding of the research or may unconsciously affect their assessment, creating an obstacle to publication for researchers who are not fluent in English. However, with the support of CACTUS' solution, Paperpal Preflight, authors submitting to Taylor & Francis journals can avoid desk-rejection due to writing quality and ensure editors and reviewers are able to focus on their research. Since Taylor & Francis adopted Paperpal Preflight in 2024, this feedback has enabled hundreds of authors to improve their manuscripts to the level required for editorial assessment. With this renewed partnership, the tool can continue to play a role in enhancing the publishing experience for researchers and helping their work achieve a global readership. Learn more about Paperpal Preflight at <https://paperpal.com/preflight>.

ACRL Releases Integrating Academic Libraries When Institutions Merge

ACRL announces the publication of *Integrating Academic Libraries When Institutions Merge* edited by Scott R. DiMarco, Lisandra R. Carmichael, and Courtney Heatley, offering ways to turn an independent organization steeped in its own procedures and mission into a merged library that is effective, cohesive, and student centered.

University and college mergers are increasingly common, and merging institutions have consequences for and demand new skills from their academic libraries. In three sections, *Integrating Academic Libraries When Institutions Merge* provides strategies for integrating collections, systems, and teams while maintaining critical library operations from authors who have undergone a merger.

- Preparing to Merge
- The New Integrated Culture
- Managing Change

The key to every merger is almost always the same: People and culture working together to



get the job done and, in the process, creating a new culture. *Integrating Academic Libraries When Institutions Merge* can help you confront the past, adapt to the present, and strategize for a sustainable future.

Integrating Academic Libraries When Institutions Merge is available for purchase in print through the ALA Online Store and Amazon.com; as an ebook through the ALA Online Store; via EBSCO, ProQuest, and other ebook vendors; and by telephone order at (866) 746-7252 in the United States or (770) 442-8633 for international customers.

ARL Annual Report Highlights Community Resilience in 2025

The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) has released its 2025 Annual Report. Last year tested research libraries in ways both familiar and newly unsettling. Across higher education, government, and civic life, trust in institutions fell to historic lows, resources became even more constrained, and the pace of technological, political, and social change was unrelenting. For the ARL and its members, these pressures were tangible—forcing difficult budget decisions, heightening scrutiny of collections and services, and increasing uncertainty around access to public data and the scientific record. View and download the report at <https://www.arl.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/ARL-Annual-Report-2025-accessible.pdf>.

Tech Bits . . .

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

Lucidchart is a quick and easy online diagramming tool that allows users to create customized flowcharts and other diagrams. As a browser-based software, no download is necessary. Drag-and-drop features for shapes and symbols, templates, and real-time collaboration capabilities enhance teamwork. Lucidchart can integrate with a variety of other tools such as Slack, Asana, Microsoft, and Google products. Diagrams are automatically saved in a user's documents folder, and there are a variety of download and print options. Free accounts limit the user to three editable documents at a time, sixty shapes per document, and one hundred templates. Paid plans provide unlimited documents, 1GB of storage, premium shapes, and templates. Support is available on the website via videos and articles.

— Donna B. Smith,
Northern Kentucky University

Lucidchart
<https://www.lucidchart.com/>

Fostering Change for Academic Library Leaders 2026 Cohort Registration Now Open

Registration is open for ACRL's annual Fostering Change for Academic Library Leaders cohort, a nine-week virtual program that aims to build a community of inclusive leaders and change agents in academic libraries. The 2026 cohort will run from June 1 through July 31, 2026. Fostering Change for Academic Library Leaders gives participants the tools to spark, lead, and sustain change no matter their organizational position. Facilitators Cinthya Ippoliti, university library dean at California State University, San Marcos, and Brianna Marshall, dean of the library at Northern Kentucky University, help you build practical strategies for working with change stakeholders inside and outside the library and cultivate leadership capacity to address the challenges facing academic libraries. Learn more on the cohort website at <https://www.ala.org/acrl/fosteringchange-cohort>. ♪

Inclusivity by Design

Creating the Best Practices Checklist for One-Shot Library Instruction

Academic libraries increasingly serve diverse student populations with varying needs, backgrounds, and learning preferences. The William H. Hannon Library (WHHL) at Loyola Marymount University has committed itself to creating “a library where inclusivity is automatic,”¹ embedding diversity, equity, inclusivity, and anti-racism (DEIA) principles in collections, spaces, operations, and throughout all library work. In response to this institutional commitment and growing instructional challenges, the library prioritized, in its 2021–26 Strategic Plan, “Action 1.1.1: Directly integrate DEIA practices into information literacy instruction to enhance students’ critical information literacy skills.”

In 2022, the Reference & Instruction Department of the library began developing a practical checklist for incorporating DEIA concepts into library instruction. Rather than organizing by information literacy outcomes, which created artificial boundaries that fragmented interconnected concepts, we developed a tiered system. We require “Essential Practices” for every session, while we recommend “Enhanced Practices” that are more context specific. After three years of iterative development through our department meetings, we produced the *Best Practices Checklist for One-Shot Library Instruction*, providing librarians concrete, implementable strategies for inclusive instruction.

Development Process

Research Foundation and Timeline

In September 2022, we began tracking accommodation requests while conducting a systematic literature review of library science and education sources (2009–23).² This dual approach—theoretical research combined with practical experience—informed our framework over multiple academic years. The literature review incorporated peer-reviewed articles; books on information literacy through diversity, equity, and universal design for learning lenses; and conference presentations. Karin Heffernan’s “Loaded Questions: The Framework for Information Literacy through a DEI Lens,”³ proved particularly influential, reframing threshold concepts as open-ended questions that invite diverse voices. This prompted us to structure our checklist around reflective, equity-focused prompts rather than prescriptive criteria. Our experience tracking individual accommodations—such as

Susan Archambault is head of reference and instruction at Loyola Marymount University, email: susan.archambault@lmu.edu. Elisa Acosta is reference and instruction librarian for education at Loyola Marymount University, email: elisa.acosta@lmu.edu. Darlene Aguilar is instructional design librarian at Loyola Marymount University, email: darlene.aguilar@lmu.edu. Samantha Blanco is reference and instruction assistant at Loyola Marymount University, email: samantha.blanco@lmu.edu. Alexander Justice is reference and instruction librarian for theology at Loyola Marymount University, email: alexander.justice@lmu.edu. Nicole Murph is reference and instruction librarian at Loyola Marymount University, email: nicole.murph@lmu.edu. Shalini Ramachandran is reference and instruction librarian for STEM at Loyola Marymount University, email: Shalini.Ramachandran@lmu.edu. José J. Rincón is reference and instruction librarian for business at Loyola Marymount University, email: jose.rincon@lmu.edu.

providing preview materials and asynchronous recordings—revealed the need to systematize these practices, shifting from reactive accommodations to proactive Universal Design for Learning benefiting all students.

Collaborative Development and Refinement

Our development process included consultation with campus Disability Support Services and structured departmental review. Department members used color coding in shared Google Docs to identify essential practices, missing elements, and implementation concerns through small group breakouts. Key decisions emerged: Embed inclusive practices into existing instruction frameworks rather than create separate documentation and focus on “best practices rather than an exhaustive exercise” to ensure usability within one-shot time constraints. The checklist structure was organized chronologically to match natural preparation flow.

Implementation and Early Results

We presented the *Best Practices Checklist* at an all-staff library meeting, emphasizing its adaptability across departments. For example, public services staff can use the checklist for accessible communication and collection development librarians can incorporate diverse authors and content in their purchasing decisions. Our Archives & Special Collections colleagues began developing their own checklist using ours as a foundation, validating both the transferability of our approach and the broader applicability of embedding DEIA principles into existing workflows.

For our department’s implementation, we revised our library instruction request form to allow faculty to indicate additional demographic information and accessibility needs. However, implementation has revealed significant challenges. We need to be realistic about what we can do in one-shot instructions and how much authority and control we have in implementing these best practices.

Another challenge involves balancing the essential versus enhanced practices given time, workload, and session constraints. For example, converting existing PowerPoint materials to accessible versions requires significant time given workload demands and short turnaround times for instruction requests. We agreed to do our best in converting our existing presentation materials to accessible versions during the school year.

Best Practices Checklist for One-Shot Library Instruction

How to Use this Checklist

- ☐ ☒ *Essential Practices: Must-do items for every instruction session*
- ☒ *Enhanced Practices: Strongly recommended when time/context allows*

Pre-Session Information Gathering

Essential Practices

- ☐ Obtain student accommodation needs from the professor. Common needs may include:
 - extended time for tests/assignments
 - alternative testing environment
 - assistive technology
 - note-taking support
 - alternative formats for materials

- accessible seating
- captioning
- service animals
- breaks during class
- Obtain copy of research assignment and understand assignment context and requirements
- Know if session is in-person, online, or hybrid
- Take note of the professor's response on the library instruction form to whether there is additional information related to student demographics that will help you prepare (e.g., majors, transfer status, nontraditional, first-gen, needing additional language support)

Enhanced Practices

- Meet with professor prior to the session and/or after the session (zoom, phone, in person, or email)
- Obtain copy of syllabus
- Request sample topics from professor if applicable or review past student work samples
- Formative assessment such as prior knowledge survey or icebreaker activity to solicit from students their needs/interests before the session begins
- Librarian research on assignment topics
- Highlight related campus events/services (e.g., LMU Food Pantry if related to topics in the library session)
- Highlight related current events
- Highlight free resources beyond the limitations of paywalls for lifelong learning, when applicable

Materials & Access

Essential Practices

- Ensure all videos have captions, transcripts, and audio descriptions (e.g., describe the key visual elements of a video)
- Have clear plan for technology needs (laptops, software and tools access, internet access, device compatibility and availability, download storage needs); consult with ITS to verify accessibility compliance for any new or unfamiliar tools and software
- Create clear pathways in physical space
- Test all tools and links before session (e.g., for accessibility, compatibility, etc.)
- Use institutional slide template
- Ensure accessible design:
 - Sans serif fonts (no less than 16 pt for core content in presentations; prepare for even bigger font upon request)
 - Clear structure and adequate “white space” (negative space, no text or images).
 - High contrast color combinations with text and backgrounds
 - For regular text: minimum 4.5:1 contrast ratio
 - For large text (18pt+ or 14pt+ bold): minimum 3:1 contrast ratio
 - Alt text for all images
 - No flickering/flashing content (could trigger seizures or cause discomfort)
- Provide step-by-step instructions and images for procedural tasks (activities with many steps).
- Share materials/LibGuide/resource ahead via learning management system/faculty

- ❑ Enable auto-captions for virtual sessions (to provide real-time closed captions)
- ❑ Check volume/audio settings for in-person and virtual
- ❑ Confirm visible sightlines to presentation (no physical barriers)

Enhanced Practices

- Offer content in multiple formats (video, audio, plain text)
- Review website accessibility (WAVE tools)
- Arrange for microphone use when needed
- Ensure adequate lighting (sufficient brightness, glare reduction, dimming for presentations)
- Develop alternative activities for different learning preferences
- Visit classroom space beforehand if possible
- Prepare backup plans for technology issues
- Provide handouts in digital and print formats
- Create Course LibGuide if unique resources are highlighted that are not covered on the general subject LibGuide

Content & Search Instruction

Essential Practices

- ❑ Include diverse authors, perspectives, sources, and topics in order to connect to students' varied backgrounds
- ❑ Illustrate how paywalls and subscription models affect access

Enhanced Practices

- Demonstrate language support features in research tools to support multilingual students when relevant
- Include connectors/extensions/full text pathways and citation chasing tools like Lib Key Nomad and Google Scholar in instructional sessions
- Discuss bias in subject headings and controlled vocabulary when relevant to research topic (Example: “Illegal aliens” vs. “Undocumented immigrants”)
- If appropriate, advise that AI tools may contain biases and limitations, including potential misinformation or varying levels of source transparency
- Demonstrate different types of authority or alternative perspectives and voices beyond traditional academic sources when relevant:
 - Community-based information:
 - Local news media
 - Community/historical archives
 - Local government -domains like .CA
 - Local organizations
 - Local histories
 - Traditional & indigenous knowledge:
 - Oral histories
 - Indigenous knowledge systems (e.g., knowledge, practices, and beliefs that Indigenous peoples have developed over time)
 - Mention of local and national indigenous repositories (e.g., tribal archives)

- Professional & technical sources:
 - Professional/practitioner expertise
 - Highlight trade publications
 - Technical reports & working papers
 - Government documents
 - Other grey literature
- Discuss systemic barriers if relevant to research topic:
 - Language and geographic limitations
 - English dominance
 - Translation barriers
- Show how information access varies globally:
 - Examine inequalities between wealthy regions and regions with limited financial resources
 - Demonstrate impact of paywalls on global research access
 - Show how database coverage varies by region
- Research representation issues
 - Citation patterns favoring Western scholars
 - Clinical trials with limited demographic diversity
 - Gaps in whose experiences get studied
- Be transparent about search results when applicable:
 - Show how sponsored content appears first in search results
 - Demonstrate how database filters/limiters affect results
 - If using Google/social media: Note that everyone might see different results based on personalization (e.g., search history, location)

Teaching Strategies

Essential Practices

- ☐ Active learning or learning by doing (actively engage students in the learning process by having them participate in meaningful activities and think critically about what they are doing, instead of passively receiving information like in a traditional lecture). Examples could include:
 - Think-pair share (two students look at a news article, they discuss, and share something to the class)
 - Case-Based Learning- analyze and solve a case
- ☐ Share information in more than one way such as verbal explanations, written explanations, visual demonstrations, or multimedia
- ☐ Build on existing knowledge (provide reminders of past knowledge, use analogies, etc.)
- ☐ Build in processing time for all students (pause when speaking, speak slower). Also, be sure to allow extra time for language processing when applicable (e.g., ESL, International, new vocabulary)
- ☐ Provide scaffolded practice opportunities (e.g., break down complex tasks into smaller steps, modeling, modifying an assignment, guided practice, etc.)
- ☐ Allow time for questions and clarification
- ☐ Offer multiple participation options based on student comfort:
 - Verbal participation
 - Written responses

- Nonverbal signals
- Collaborative documents (Padlet, Google Docs) or online polling
- Working individually or with peers
- Working anonymously for sensitive topics

Enhanced Practices

- Offer various options for previewing materials or reviewing materials - (e.g., script in notes field of slides, AI generated notes, zoom recordings)
- Incorporate *ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*
- Integrate student-generated search terms/topics into presentation materials when possible
- Incorporate reflection into activities or assessments
- Use random selection for groups during peer learning to create a mix of perspectives
- Build in time for peer learning
- Create opportunities for student choice in activities when possible
- Include diverse guest expert perspectives when possible (e.g., short video clips)
- Prepare students for cold calling if used
- Formative assessment (e.g., Interactive Polls & Quizzes) to gauge understanding

Classroom Environment

Essential Practices

- ☐ Avoid gendered language when pronouns unknown
- ☐ Acknowledge all student contributions, even if not the answer you were looking for (e.g., I appreciate you sharing your personal experience on this topic; can anyone else share a different viewpoint?; this is a complex question with multiple valid answers)
- ☐ Create welcoming atmosphere:
 - Greet students as they enter
 - Introduce yourself clearly
 - Set positive tone

Enhanced Practices

- Use pronouns in introduction
- Practice using inclusive language consistently (e.g., name specific groups rather than “minorities”) For example, see APA’s *Inclusive Language Guide*⁴
- Avoid examples limited to a specific culture, subgroup, or generation (e.g., pop culture figure or historical figure) or be sure to explain them if present
- Have plan for addressing microaggressions (e.g., acknowledge the comment, state why it’s problematic, and redirect to the research focus; ask the professor for help on how to handle if needed)
- Address controversial or politicized topics respectfully:
 - Acknowledge different viewpoints exist
 - Maintain respectful discussion environment
 - Ask the professor for help/to intervene if necessary
- Consider student wellbeing:
 - For longer sessions, consider giving students breaks
 - Validate that research can be frustrating

Conclusion

To foster inclusive and equitable learning environments, libraries should actively incorporate DEIA principles into their instruction practices. We encourage other institutions to adapt or modify our checklist, which continues to evolve.⁵ Although the checklist was ultimately renamed due to the political climate, we maintain our commitment to inclusive practices. This practical tool guides librarians from preparing instruction to delivering it, empowering them to provide effective one-shot instruction while supporting students through learner-centered approaches. By fostering critical information literacy, we support lifelong learning and informed citizenship essential to a democratic society. ♪

Notes

1. William H. Hannon Library, “Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Antiracism@ the Library,” <https://library.lmu.edu/deia/>.
2. William H. Hannon Library Reference & Instruction Department, “DEIA and Library Instruction (WHHL)-Collaborative Bibliography,” Zotero, created November 2022, https://www.zotero.org/groups/4862183/deia_and_library_instructionoutreach_whhl.
3. Karin Heffernan, “Loaded Questions: The Framework for Information Literacy through a DEI Lens,” *College & Research Libraries News* 81, no. 8 (2020): 382–86, <https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.81.8.382>.
4. American Psychological Association, *Inclusive Language Guide*, 2nd ed. (2023), <https://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guidelines.pdf>.
5. William H. Hannon Library Reference & Instruction Department, “Best Practices Checklist for One-Shot Library Instruction” (2025), https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/librarian_pubs/165.

From Listener to Learner

A Podcast to Peek Behind the Curtain of Research Experiences

Multiple barriers contribute to undergraduates' lack of involvement in research, including self-doubt, misperceptions about research, and naivete about resources. Furthermore, when research is highlighted, the focus is often on polished final products and described in specialized language that can make such experiences feel even more unattainable to students. We created a podcast focused on the *hows* and *whys*—not just the *whats*—of research and inquiry experiences to pull back the curtain and make processes and pathways more transparent. Our conversations with guests help normalize challenges and roadblocks related to research and inquiry. In this article, we reflect on takeaways from our podcasting experience that support undergraduate research teaching and learning: practices and attitudes that guests uncovered as central to their experiences and the value of storytelling as a tool for pedagogy and community building.

A Podcast to Make the Research Process More Transparent

The literature shows undergraduate research is a “high-impact practice.”¹ However, only a fraction of graduating seniors report participating in undergraduate research.² A variety of barriers contribute to undergraduates' lack of involvement, including self-doubt, misperceptions about research, and lack of awareness and understanding about pathways to engage in research and resources to support research.³

In an effort to pull back the curtain on the paths and processes related to research that are so often opaque and confusing, we created the podcast *From Concept to Creation: Uncovering the Making of Scholarly and Creative Accomplishments*. Episodes feature conversations with guests about a research/inquiry project and/or a professional path. We draw out guests' reflections on the inner workings (i.e., steps, skills, behaviors, and attitudes), pivotal moments, and rough edges of their experiences and journeys, as well as the resources, partners, and mentors integral to their process. By offering a behind-the-scenes view of the frequently hidden and messy process of research and inquiry experiences, we aim to increase their transparency, thereby making them more approachable and accessible. In so doing, we also seek to expose challenges inherent in these experiences and reframe these difficulties as expected and even productive rather than as roadblocks.

Our podcast grew out of an in-person panel discussion series we developed for our campus with similar aims: cultivating students' awareness of research- and information literacy-related behaviors and attitudes, reducing barriers between faculty/staff and students, and

Jennifer Jarson is head librarian at Penn State Lehigh Valley and interim head librarian at Penn State Schuylkill, email: jmj12@psu.edu. Kate Morgan is a senior instructional designer at Penn State World Campus, email: kjm19@psu.edu.

promoting an inquiry culture.⁴ During the COVID-19 pandemic, we moved the program online via Zoom. Recognizing that online delivery could help extend the program's reach to include the entire Penn State ecosystem, we transitioned to the podcast format as it offered still greater versatility.

Podcast Guests Reflect on Undergraduate Research Experiences and More

As of spring 2026, we have interviewed thirty-seven guests and published thirty episodes in four seasons.⁵ Guests include Penn State students, faculty, staff, and alumni from across disciplines, experience levels, and campus locations. Many episodes feature undergraduates and recent alumni reflecting on their undergraduate research experiences. Safitaj Sindhar and Neila Raveen, for example, discussed how they took their first steps toward research and overcame self-doubt to clarify their interests and goals. Elizabeth Schachte explored how her course-based research experiences shaped her academic and professional path. Austin Murray reflected on motivation and persistence, as well as the impact of relationships with mentors and collaborators.

A number of episodes examine mentors' perspectives in facilitating undergraduate research and inquiry experiences. For example, Dr. Marisa Nicosia, Dr. Heather Froehlich, and Christina Riehman-Murphy discussed their collaboration leading a historical recipe research project. Dr. Pauline Milwood discussed guiding students through an inquiry experience planning and implementing a pop-up restaurant. Dr. Christopher Shelton, along with student Remington Orange, reflected on their mentoring relationship.

Although we are committed to exploring and advancing research and inquiry for undergraduates in our podcast, we are not exclusively focused on it. Other episodes feature graduate students, faculty, and others whose reflections have relevance for researchers at all levels. Undergraduates may also specifically benefit from glimpses into graduate and postgraduate research experiences as they consider their own paths. For example, Jack Daly discussed his process researching folklore as a PhD candidate and, in so doing, explored how to use an inquiry mindset to examine everyday life. In reflecting on her trajectory from undergraduate to distinguished professor, Dr. Linda Treviño showcased the integral roles of curiosity, motivation, and open-mindedness in research.

Research Practices and Attitudes Central to Guests' Experiences

Because our conversations focus on the process of our guests' experiences in order to promote transparency and accessibility, we are able to uncover the skills, behaviors, and attitudes central to their work and paths. Using our observations during recording sessions and reflections on episode transcripts, we have identified three major themes to describe practices and attitudes related to undergraduate research: spirit of inquiry, decision-making, and conceptualization of research.

The spirit of inquiry theme includes practices and attitudes that propel researchers forward, especially in the face of challenges or barriers: creativity, curiosity, confidence, and perseverance. Guests described these practices and attitudes time and again, often referring to them as hallmarks of their experiences. In some cases, guests described calling on these practices and attitudes to support their success, and in other cases described them as cultivated through their experiences, whether intentionally or incidentally.

Our conversation with three engineering undergraduates—Mary Wilson, Tobey Field, and Ethan Davies—helps illustrate the spirit of inquiry theme. These students talked about research in multiple contexts: as a team in a summer research intensive program, as part of a real-world project for their Engineers without Borders club, and in preparing for their senior theses. Their reflections emphasized how scaffolding their research experiences helped them build skills and knowledge that they could transfer across contexts, incrementally building confidence. They also noted how research experiences challenged them in ways classroom experiences did not, teaching them to persevere through setbacks and challenges and be creative and collaborative problem solvers.

Take the following excerpt from Field's remarks:

"I feel like in the classroom, when you're given an assignment, you know what to do. You know ... this is the answer, right? And then when you start your [research] project ... well, there's no answer. I'm going to have to figure it out on my own. And it's kind of just that I have all this free will... They prepared me with the fundamentals, but it's up to me to use those to actually find the solution."

Field's reflection signals the creativity and curiosity that helped him build confidence and persevere in the research environment.

The decision-making theme includes practices and attitudes that help researchers manage change and embrace the unexpected, even failure: navigating uncertainty, self-awareness, and metacognition, or the ability to plan, monitor, regulate, and transfer learning. Many guests described how their research and inquiry experiences helped them develop comfort with uncertainty—for example, when they hit roadblocks, when they had to pivot or start over, or when their understanding of their goals or motivations shifted. Some guests noted that self-awareness and metacognitive skills helped them navigate uncertainty, which helped them later recognize that disappointments and failures could actually be productive opportunities.

Our conversation with Marisa DeCollibus, in which she discussed her experience moving from high school through undergraduate work to PhD, helps illustrate this theme. DeCollibus provided a glimpse into the range of uncertainties in and around her undergraduate research career. She developed an interest in mindfulness early on and wanted to keep exploring the topic as an undergraduate. However, no one at her institution worked in this area. With the guidance of mentors in adjacent areas, she found a way forward with an internship and a mentored research project. DeCollibus applied for prestigious fellowships but was wait-listed, thereby disrupting her post-graduation plans and seeding self-doubt. She went on to work as an advisor to high school students, something she hadn't planned on doing but that opened up new ideas and avenues. It turned out to be a highly influential experience and directed her PhD path.

The following excerpt from DeCollibus' remarks illustrates this:

"I might always feel a little unsure. I might always feel a little uncertain. But the sooner I get comfortable with that, the better."

These comments signal her capacity for reflection and self-awareness, pointing to the value of these skills for helping her process uncertainties she encountered as productive.

The conceptualization of research theme includes practices and attitudes that reflect researchers' perception of the core ideas or principles of their research experiences, especially around research as an iterative process and the value of mentoring. Guests frequently communicated their understanding of research as a cyclical process characterized by repetition, adaptation, and evolution, rather than a linear process that moves only predictably and sequentially. They also frequently conceptualized undergraduate research as an experience in which learning about process should be prioritized, even over learning about content. Guests also reflected on the impact of good mentorship on their understanding, describing relationships with mentors as cornerstones of their work and journeys.

Our conversation with Rishika Patil helps illustrate practices and attitudes with respect to the conceptualization of research theme. When we spoke with her, Patil was majoring in biochemistry and molecular biology with three years of research experience. Immediately upon starting her first year, Patil applied to join a lab. She noted that she came into college wanting to do research in microbiology and infectious disease but decided to put her specific interest aside because she realized that she didn't know enough about how research worked. She decided it was more important to pursue a position in a lab with a strong mentoring culture.

The following excerpt from Patil's remarks illustrates this theme:

"I've just learned so much about being patient with things. I think we're in a very results-driven time ... And that's just not how research always works. You're essentially asking questions that no one knows the answers to ... so it's kind of like appreciating the process of that rather than just trying to get to an end product. But using every little bit of information that you get on the way to contribute to something ... That's something that I underestimated going into research."

Her comments signal how her experiences helped her transform her perspective to conceptualize research as a process.

As we reflect on the conversations we've had with guests and the themes that are central to their stories, what we're really seeing are the soft skills (also known as power skills or durable skills) and habits of mind that are integral to and intrinsic in the practice of undergraduate research. Consistent with the literature, these stories cast a spotlight on the significance of soft skills and habits of mind to the orbit of undergraduate research engagement, growth, and impact.⁶ Our guests' reflections also show that they themselves considered these as significant outcomes in their own right, which they have often been able to transfer into different contexts. Importantly, then, our guests' stories show how they recognize their research and inquiry experiences as fruitful for practicing and developing such skills, practices, and attitudes.

Storytelling for Undergraduate Research Teaching and Learning

Our guests told us time and again how much fun it was to talk in this reflective way about their experiences and, at times, how they had new realizations about their experiences by doing so. That is to say, by creating space for our guests to reflect on the process of their work, many were able to extract more meaning from it. We believe this is an opportunity for enhancing pedagogy around undergraduate research—that carving out opportunities for intentional, guided reflection can deepen the experiences' impacts for these students.

The behind-the-scenes views our guests offered personalized research and inquiry experiences. By increasing transparency and humanizing and normalizing these experiences, including their challenges, sharing stories in this way extends the impact of these experiences beyond individual researchers to a broader audience. Given the utility of storytelling as a tool for building community and belonging,⁷ we see sharing the process, not just the product, of these experiences as key to supporting and growing undergraduate research teaching and learning. *~*

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Envisioning AI's Role in Libraries

Perspectives from an LIS Student, a Library Director, and a University Librarian

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is no longer a distant horizon for libraries—it is already reshaping how we teach, preserve, and connect communities with knowledge. The question is not whether AI belongs in libraries but rather how we integrate it in ways that are ethical, equitable, and aligned with our missions. This article is framed as a dialogue among colleagues at three different career stages, offering distinct but complementary perspectives. As a current LIS student, Ava Wallace brings the urgency of an emerging professional grounded in social justice and cultural preservation. At the mid-career stage, Russell Michalak contributes the perspective of a library director, emphasizing ethical integration and scalable strategies that position libraries as leaders in AI literacy and institutional change. Trevor A. Dawes, a senior leader in the profession, offers national insights on how library organizations can shape responsible adoption. Together, our perspectives—emerging, mid-career, and senior leadership—highlight both opportunities and challenges, pointing toward a shared vision for how libraries can remain human-centered in an AI-driven world.

The Promise and Peril of GenAI

GenAI presents both promise and peril. On one hand, Russell has witnessed students use it to unlock new forms of learning—revising narrative essays with greater confidence, summarizing difficult articles in accessible ways, or even visualizing concepts that help them grasp ideas more fully. These are real moments of empowerment in which GenAI serves as a tool to extend creativity and deepen understanding.

For Russell, the promise is real, but so is the peril. AI can extend creativity and deepen learning, but without equity at the center—without closing the gap between “free” and “full”—it risks becoming another barrier rather than a bridge. One example came during a first-year writing session where a student used Grammarly’s chatbot to “make the essay more juicy.” The output was polished, energetic, and—at first glance—impressive. But when the class compared the revision with the student’s original draft, the room grew quiet. The student admitted that though the GenAI had dressed up the prose, it no longer sounded like them. Their voice, their humor, their perspective had been flattened into something generic. This realization sparked a powerful discussion about authorship, authenticity, and what it means to develop a personal academic voice in the age of GenAI.

Russell Michalak is director of the library and archives at Goldey-Beacom College and the co-founder of Inclusive Knowledge Solutions, email: michalr@gbc.edu. Trevor A. Dawes, a librarian, educator, and consultant, is the co-founder of Inclusive Knowledge Solutions, email: tadawes@udel.edu. Ava Wallace is an MLIS Student at San José State University, email: ava.wallace@sjsu.edu.

For Ava, these questions are powerful reminders not to get caught up in “AI hype” or let the technical capabilities of AI overshadow what is lost through automation. She also highlights the tension from another angle—underscoring both opportunity and risk for the profession. She sees the potential for GenAI to accelerate cataloging and clear long-standing backlogs, freeing professionals to focus on community programming and direct patron support. Yet she also voices unease at what is risked in this tradeoff: “In the worst case, increased automation depersonalizes services, alienates users, and reduces entry-level LIS positions.” For Ava, AI is not just about technical efficiencies; it also carries implications for labor, identity, and the professional pathways that sustain librarianship. Her reflections remind us that in fields already strained by funding cuts, we must be vigilant about whether GenAI strengthens or erodes our collective capacity to serve.

Trevor, in turn, emphasizes a different dimension of promise—one centered on access and discovery. He highlights AI’s ability to make the invisible visible: transcribing handwritten diaries, translating materials across languages, and generating metadata that surfaces collections once hidden behind poor indexing. These tools could democratize access to knowledge, making it possible for a student searching a library catalog to discover a family history letter or a rare archival document that would otherwise remain buried. For Trevor, AI is an accelerant to discovery, extending the reach of libraries to patrons who may not otherwise benefit from specialized knowledge or language expertise.

Together, these perspectives are a reminder that GenAI is neither inherently progressive nor inherently harmful—it is a tool whose value is determined by how we choose to use it. Russell’s concerns about equity, Ava’s cautions about labor and depersonalization, and Trevor’s vision for expanded access converge on a single point: Libraries must steer adoption with intention. If we allow efficiency or market pressures to dictate use, we risk undermining our mission. But if we ground implementation in our enduring values—equity, preservation, and service—GenAI can be shaped into a resource that strengthens, rather than weakens, the human core of librarianship.

Equitable Access as the Central Challenge

The defining challenge of AI in libraries is equitable access. Tools are only as powerful as the communities that can use them, and when access is limited to those who can afford personal subscriptions, inequity deepens. Free versions exist, but free is not the same as full—“freemium” models often restrict functionality or monetize student data, leaving those without means at a disadvantage. At Goldey-Beacom College, a Hispanic-Serving Institution where many students are first generation and balancing work with school, equity is a lived necessity. This is why Russell prioritized securing campuswide licenses: They ensure that every student—whether first-generation, working-class, or international—has the same opportunity to engage with GenAI. Equitable licensing is not just a technical choice; it is a justice issue, one that prevents GenAI literacy from becoming stratified along economic lines. It also reflects CALM leadership in action: Communication to explain clearly what students can expect from these tools, Adaptability to adjust licensing and access as needs evolve, Learning to ensure both students and staff build capacity alongside technology, and Management to embed ethics and accountability into every decision.

Ava extends Russell’s point by situating access challenges within broader structural realities of funding and staffing. Libraries and archives, she notes, routinely face budget cuts,

staff shortages, and mounting workloads. Against this backdrop, AI can look like a lifeline. But Ava is clear eyed about the danger of seeing it as a substitute for sustainable investment: “Given that public services are in a constant state of funding crisis, I don’t blame people for seeking band-aids. But that is how we should discuss them—as emergency measures while we advocate for the resources communities truly need.” For her, equitable access means not just distributing tools but also ensuring that communities are not forced to settle for technology in place of people, care, and long-term support.

From Ava’s focus on local and structural challenges, Trevor broadens the conversation to the national stage, pointing to the role of professional organizations in shaping equitable frameworks at scale. He argues that associations like ARL and ACRL must build strategies that support all institutions, not only the best-resourced. Cooperative purchasing agreements modeled on database consortia could keep smaller libraries from being priced out of AI adoption. Just as importantly, Trevor emphasizes nonnegotiable privacy standards so that students and patrons at every institution can trust that their data is secure. Shared infrastructure and training, he suggests, would also help libraries avoid duplicating costs and reinventing the wheel. His vision is of a professional community that ensures equity not just within institutions but also across the ecosystem of libraries.

The lesson from these perspectives is clear: Equity must remain at the center of AI adoption. Russell’s work shows how campus-level licensing can level the playing field, Ava highlights the local risks of treating AI as a replacement for funding, and Trevor outlines national strategies to prevent inequities from widening. Whether through institutional policies, collaborative consortia, or professional standards, libraries must ensure that AI access is not stratified along lines of privilege. Only then can AI serve as a tool of democratization rather than division.

Teaching Literacy, Preserving Human Judgment

The greatest risk of GenAI in libraries is not the technology itself but rather the erosion of the critical thinking skills our profession has always nurtured. Students can already generate text, summaries, and even citations at the click of a button—but do they understand what makes an argument credible or a source trustworthy? Russell has embedded AI literacy into the first-year curriculum precisely because he views it as inseparable from information literacy. When introducing students to AI tools, he doesn’t frame them as shortcuts but rather as opportunities to ask deeper questions: Where did this information come from? What biases might be embedded here? What data were excluded? Students learn that GenAI is not a neutral oracle but rather a constructed system whose outputs must be tested, interrogated, and sometimes challenged.

Reinforcing this concern about embedding AI literacy into curricula, Trevor underscores the urgency of this approach, warning that without intentional guidance, libraries risk losing their central role in cultivating critical thinking. He observes that AI’s capacity to produce polished, plausible-sounding responses makes it especially dangerous in educational contexts. “The erosion of information literacy and critical thinking skills is my deepest concern,” he explains. “When AI can instantly generate plausible-sounding answers, many patrons may lose the ability to evaluate sources or understand the difference between synthesis and analysis.” The challenge is not just about helping students recognize bad information; it is also about preserving the deeper habits of mind that make scholarly inquiry possible. His warning reminds us that libraries must step into an even more active role as educators, reinforcing the difference between knowledge and noise.

Responding to Trevor's concern about erosion of critical thinking, Ava adds another layer, expanding the very definition of literacy to include ethical discernment as well as functional use. From her perspective as an archival intern, literacy is not limited to functional use but also includes ethical discernment: "Literacy does not only mean how to use something; it also means how to think critically about it, how to assess its accuracy, and how to determine when it is or is not an appropriate tool to turn to." Her words highlight an often-overlooked dimension: Literacy is not adoption for its own sake but rather the cultivation of judgment. Ava's reminder resonates with Russell because it recenters the human role in determining when speed, automation, or convenience should yield to slower, more intentional practices of learning and preservation.

Libraries are uniquely positioned to preserve human judgment in an AI-saturated world. We have long been trusted as guides who help patrons navigate evolving forms of information. Embedding AI literacy early and consistently in our teaching ensures that students gain not just technical competence but also the discernment to know when and why to use AI—and when to resist it. Russell's emphasis on embedding AI literacy through the CALM framework, Trevor's concern about losing critical thinking, and Ava's insistence on critical discernment converge here: Literacy must be our anchor. By holding fast to this mission, libraries can ensure that the rapid adoption of AI does not erode our most essential human capacities.

Visions for 2030

By 2030, Russell sees libraries stepping forward as national anchors of AI literacy, shaping how communities across the country learn, question, and use these tools responsibly. Our role will not simply be to adopt AI but also to ensure its integration reflects equity, transparency, and care. Just as libraries once bridged the digital divide, we will bridge the AI divide—securing access that is not determined by income, geography, or institutional size. This future will require leadership grounded in the CALM framework. In this vision, campuswide licenses, shared training models, and national standards become not just technical fixes but also expressions of CALM leadership. Libraries become the places where technology is democratized and where the public learns not only how to use AI but also how to preserve judgment, voice, and cultural memory in an AI-driven society.

Russell's vision emphasizes equitable access and the CALM framework, and Trevor shares a similar aspiration but frames the future as a cultural transformation of libraries into "vibrant community learning laboratories where AI handles routine tasks and librarians focus on critical thinking, cultural preservation, and human connection." For Trevor, the promise of AI is not simply in what it can do but also in what it frees us to do—create more space for librarians to serve as teachers, mentors, and cultural stewards. His vision situates libraries as both technologically advanced and profoundly human, places where efficiency enables deeper engagement with the communities they serve.

Ava, however, challenges both of these visions with a reminder that even as we look ahead, efficiency cannot be our only measure of progress. For her, the future of libraries must also be grounded in justice, care, and preservation. She imagines institutions that adopt AI thoughtfully, always balancing technological innovation with commitments to social justice and cultural preservation. Efficiency, she warns, must never eclipse care. For Ava, the library of 2030 should not be measured by how quickly it can process collections or deliver answers

but rather by how well it preserves relationships, histories, and communities. Her vision is a challenge to remember that progress is not just about speed but also about values.

Together, these perspectives form a collective aspiration: libraries that embrace technological change while staying firmly grounded in the principles that have always defined our work—equity, preservation, and human connection. By 2030, Russell hopes libraries will stand out as centers of AI engagement, where librarians actively partner with students and faculty to ensure critical thinking guides every interaction with AI, supported by ongoing training for librarians themselves. With Russell’s focus on equitable access and literacy, Trevor’s emphasis on community laboratories, and Ava’s emphasis on justice and care, we outline a shared future where libraries remain indispensable guides through a rapidly evolving information landscape.

These viewpoints explore both the opportunities and challenges of AI in libraries. In a companion article in the June 2026 issue of *C&RL News*, we extend this dialogue by examining how these perspectives intersect around innovation, equity, and responsibility across the profession. ♪

Teaching Students to Think Critically About AI

Practical Approaches for Academic Librarians in Designing Literacy Instruction

The widespread use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) applications has reshaped how people interact with and interpret information. Within higher education, these technologies are already influencing core academic practices, from research and writing to teaching and learning, raising important questions about authenticity, critical thinking, and responsible use. Although we have witnessed the prevalence of generative AI use by students, restricting access to these technologies is neither feasible nor practical, as their daily digital environments are already integrated with AI. Consequently, because education constitutes an integral part of an individual's life, we can no longer compartmentalize AI use as an external tool but rather must thoughtfully embrace this evolving reality and cultivate students' capacity for responsible use of AI. As these technologies become ubiquitous, an imperative question arises: How can students be equipped not just to use AI but also to understand, question, and engage with it critically?

Academic libraries, as long-standing stewards of information literacy within academic communities, are transitioning from information intermediaries to critical mediators of AI literacy.¹ Critical AI literacy can be positioned as an extension of information literacy in the age of generative AI. I am of the view that bringing together constructivist learning theory and the principles of data justice gives academic librarians a powerful way to design literacy instruction that encourages constructive use of generative AI and reflects on the ethical and social impacts of these technologies. In this discussion, I unpack a range of practical approaches and methods that librarians can weave into their teaching and collaborative work to help students navigate AI technologies in a more thoughtful and responsible way.

Why Critical AI Literacy Matters

Critical AI literacy has grown out of traditional digital literacy, pulling together key aspects of information literacy, media literacy, and critical thinking into one framework for understanding and working with AI systems and applications. Nowadays, just being technically skilled isn't enough when it comes to using AI-based tools. Although students can generate content from AI applications with minimal effort, many lack understanding of AI's limitations, biases, and potential for misinformation. Recent research indicates that issues such as AI hallucination (when systems generate plausible but incorrect information), overreliance on AI outputs, and inherited biases are increasingly common. In this context, critical AI literacy extends beyond technical proficiency to critically assessing the generated output and applying it responsibly with an awareness of socio-ethical considerations. Duri Long and

J. M. Shalani Dilinika is a PhD candidate in the University of Pittsburgh School of Computing and Information and a lecturer at the Department of Library and Information Science, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, email: shj91@pitt.edu.

Brian Magerko, in defining AI literacy, highlighted critical literacy as individuals' capacity to critically evaluate AI technologies.² Hence, merely having technical proficiency in generative AI technologies is no longer sufficient to use them effectively; instead, questioning the output, understanding limitations, and recognizing broader socioethical implications are essential for individuals to engage with such technologies in a constructive and responsible way.

Designing AI Literacy: Where Constructivism Meets Data Justice

The intersection of critical AI literacy with constructivist theory and data justice principles provides a robust theoretical foundation for literacy instruction that promotes both the constructive use of AI technologies and thoughtful consideration of their broader implications.

Constructivist learning stresses building knowledge through active participation rather than passive consumption, pushing students to analyze and question AI outputs. In literacy education, this means encouraging active learning through critical perspectives.³ A key part of this is the idea of “productive struggle,” where students wrestle with difficult concepts, work through confusion, and gain understanding through guided discovery instead of direct instruction.

Data justice principles complement this active learning approach by helping students understand the human impact of data practices. This framework examines how data collection, storage, analysis, and distribution affect communities, with particular attention to fairness and equity. Linnet Taylor defined data justice as “fairness in the way people are made visible, represented, and treated as a result of their production of digital data.”⁴ When applied to AI literacy, data justice principles help students recognize that AI systems are not neutral; they reflect the values, biases, and limitations embedded in their training data and design processes. Supporting this, several studies have highlighted the potential of employing data justice principles as a foundation for designing literacy activities across multiple disciplines.^{5,6}

Four Practical Instructional Approaches for Academic Librarians

Building on constructivist learning and data justice, the following four approaches can help librarians design critical AI literacy instruction. Each approach is flexible enough to fit different settings, from a single session to a full workshop series.

1. Design-Based Learning Activities

Design-based learning activities engage students in open-ended, inquiry-driven projects where they identify problems, empathize with users, and create solutions. These approaches work particularly well for critical AI literacy instruction because they provide natural opportunities for students to develop critical thinking skills and to understand the social and ethical impacts of generative AI.

Design-based approaches such as Value-Sensitive Design, Speculative Design, and User-Centered Design give librarians practical ways to help students think critically about AI. For example, librarians can use case studies to guide students in spotting problems or examining issues like bias and privacy. From there, students can prototype simple solutions, even paper-based ones, to think through how AI could be made fairer and more responsible. Reflection prompts along the way encourage them to ask not only *how* their design works but also *whose* values it reflects and *what* impacts it might have.

Speculative design adds another dimension by encouraging students to imagine future scenarios and the societal impacts of emerging technologies. Design activities can serve as a medium to spark discussion about the social, cultural, and ethical implications of these technologies. Many researchers have identified speculative design as a critical design domain and a tool for exploring “What if?” questions and the implications of different scenarios.⁷ In critical AI literacy instruction, librarians can encourage learners to envision hypothetical AI-based scenarios—for example, imagining a future where AI systems determine the distribution of social benefits based on a predictive algorithm. Learners are encouraged to speculate about future possibilities and engage through digital storytelling and narration throughout the process, questioning and critically examining issues of fairness, bias, and social justice in AI-driven decision-making.

2. Metacognitive Activities and Ethical Reflection

The concept of *metacognition* can be defined simply as “thinking about thinking,” which is a form of self-regulated behavior. Metacognition enables individuals to monitor their actions, reflect on them, gain control over their behavior, and modify it based on that reflection.^{8,9} In critical AI literacy instruction, librarians can incorporate metacognitive activities in different ways. Activities such as guided reflection on AI-generated texts (AI output analysis), metacognitive journals, think-aloud exercises, source evaluation checklists, and peer discussions prompt learners to monitor their reasoning, identify biases, and consider the ethical implications of AI-generated content. Students can be prompted with questions such as the following:

- How might this content influence decisions or perceptions if shared without verification?
- In what ways could your personal viewpoints or prior experiences shape how you interpret this information?
- What information might be missing or overlooked in this AI-generated text?

These output analyses add an important layer of critical thinking to literacy instruction while supporting the constructive use of AI. This connects with the idea of *information discernment*, which highlights how human judgment, bias, and decision-making shape how we evaluate information.¹⁰ In the age of generative AI, it is especially important to verify AI outputs and apply human judgment to make informed decisions. These perspectives also align with the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy, which emphasizes meta literacy and metacognition, or critical self-reflection, as key for becoming self-directed learners in today’s fast-changing information ecosystem.¹¹

3. Maker Activities

Maker activities are basically hands-on learning experiences where people build knowledge by designing or creating a product or artifact. The idea of *making* or the *maker movement* comes from constructivism, which stresses learning through experience, exploration, and reflection. In critical AI literacy instruction, maker activities can help learners build both practical skills and critical awareness for using emerging technologies responsibly. For example, Clifford H. Lee, Nimah Gobir, Alex Gurn, and Elisabeth Soep introduced students to the hidden elements of recommender systems and the surveillance risks of facial recognition. In response, students worked together to create multimedia artifacts and prototypes that expressed their critical standpoint.¹²

4. Dialogical Activities

Based on the theories of Lev Vygotsky and other social constructivists, dialogical learning emphasizes that learners actively build knowledge through social interaction and cultural context rather than passively absorbing information. In the context of critical AI literacy, dialogical activities help learners critically evaluate AI-generated content or work with case studies and scenarios to explore the socioethical implications of AI outputs. These activities can include role play, peer discussions, data storytelling, data mapping, and online or in-person forums, enabling learners to engage, share perspectives, and collaboratively reflect on complex issues.¹³

As discussed earlier, these literacy activities can be adapted across disciplines and levels in planning AI literacy instruction. They work in different formats, from one-shot sessions to full classroom instruction or tailored approaches. Librarians can also use generative AI to design prompts and create scenarios. Activities may be scaled up or simplified depending on context, resources, and learner level.

Assessing the Success of Instructional Approaches

Learning goals should be set before instruction, and evaluation methods such as observations, exit surveys, self-reflections, or quizzes are important for measuring progress and gathering feedback based on context (e.g., student level, discipline). These assessments must remain low-stakes and nonjudgmental, with the goal of supporting students. Most importantly, critical AI literacy instruction needs to be flexible, encouraging learners to be innovative, creative, and open to making mistakes and learning from them. Engaging in constructive and reflective practices in this way is essential for developing critical AI literacy skills through real-world experiences.

Conclusion

As society is increasingly shaped by emerging technologies, critical AI literacy has become a civic imperative. Students need support to move beyond technical skills and critically engage with AI by analyzing outputs, recognizing biases, and reflecting on ethical and social implications. Approaches such as design-based, dialogical, metacognitive, and maker activities provide opportunities for learners to question and explore the socio-ethical dimensions of AI through real-world experiences. *~*

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Kristina Clement and Rhiana Murphy

Loving It Enough to Critique It

A Year of Exploring Why We Choose 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, but this series hopes to go further by minimizing barriers to traditional publishing with an accessible format. In past issues, the topics were proposed by the authors. However, during 2026, this feature will focus on the authors' stories of librarianship. How they got here, why they stay, and even why they consider leaving or transitioning at times. During this time of great upheaval in higher education, exploring our many "whys" is a worthy venture. —*Dustin Fife, series editor*

Kristina Clement (KC): When I tried to answer the question, "Why do you stay in academic librarianship?" I kept finding myself slipping into one of two voices. In one version, I sounded like a promotional brochure for the profession; in the other, I sounded like I was giving a confessional. Neither one felt like the honest middle. It's hard to talk about what we love and what we struggle with at the same time—because while work *can* matter and be deeply meaningful to us, librarianship still deserves constant critique.

Rhiana Murphy (RM): That tension is exactly why I wanted to have this conversation. The pull toward "selling" librarianship is real, and the pull toward "surviving" it is real too. But the truth lives in the mix: the genuine meaning, the genuine costs, and the things we've learned about boundaries, especially in a profession that can drift into vocational awe¹ and treat criticism like betrayal.

KC: So, Rhiana, tell me how you found your way into academic libraries.

RM: My path into libraries started with the assumptions a lot of people have: that libraries are quiet, interesting places to work. I was also drawn to the idea of libraries as one of society's democratic promises, and I wanted work that felt meaningful. In other words, I came in idealistic and shaped by outside perceptions—some accurate, some not. I was also seeking stability, something neither my parents nor I had fully experienced. I know now academic libraries aren't universally stable; I've held underpaid, precarious roles, and not all library jobs are created equal. Still, compared to the blue-collar work I did before, my current position feels steadier.

Kristina Clement is assistant director of academic engagement and instruction, collegiate librarians, at Kennesaw State University, email: kcleme19@kennesaw.edu. Rhiana Murphy is teaching and learning librarian at Auraria Library, email: rhiana.murphy@ucdenver.edu.

KC: My entry point was different: My parents were academic librarians, so I grew up around academic libraries and had a clearer picture than most people of what the job can actually look like. Even so, it took me a long time to admit it was the career for me. I resisted it for years—I didn’t want to follow in my parents’ footsteps, and I wasn’t sure what I wanted instead. For a while, I even imagined becoming a professor because I loved universities and university life.

What finally made it click was realizing academic librarianship sits at a rare intersection of two things I enjoy most: business administration and academics. Libraries are mission-driven spaces, but they’re also operational realities—budgets, systems, planning, people, strategy. That hybrid is what made the profession feel like home. And in hindsight, I feel fortunate: Because I grew up around the work, I didn’t run into the same “hidden curriculum” surprises I’ve seen so many others have to decode on the fly.

RM: One of the biggest surprises for me was the emotional labor. I didn’t expect to navigate pressure from the institution, within the library, outside the library, and sometimes from the public. I imagined I’d spend a lot more time on programming and “fun stuff,” but librarianship is often caregiving, and I learned quickly that the work asks you to carry other people’s stress alongside your own. I spend far more time caring for others and worrying about organizational realities than I ever expected. And contrary to popular belief, I’ve never had time to read a whole leisure book at work.

I also didn’t realize how much the schedule would matter to me. Time off matters more than it might to someone who’s always had it. As a first-generation professional, I know my parents never had a predictable Monday-through-Friday rhythm; their work often meant sunrise-to-sunset obligations for months at a time. So I don’t take nights, weekends, or holidays off for granted. While librarianship hasn’t turned out to be exactly what I imagined, the steadier schedule, the option to work from home, and a culture that respects work-life balance are big parts of why I can see myself staying. For me, those aren’t perks—they’re necessities. They’re also worth advocating for because they help keep the work sustainable and keep our jobs from becoming our entire identities.

KC: That mismatch between expectation and reality is common—in this profession and others—and it’s one of the reasons I think these conversations matter. Sometimes people come into librarianship expecting “books,” and what they find is teaching, relationship building, collaboration, and emotional work layered into the job. Even when the work is rewarding, it still has weight, and a lot of that weight is invisible until you’re in it, and even thereafter.

RM: I’m glad you mentioned collaboration because the best parts of the job still feel deeply human to me. For me, that often shows up in collaboration, like working with a colleague to review a workshop we’ve been doing—including integrating student feedback, making our own observations, and considering our colleagues’ observations—and then trying to make the workshop better. That kind of reflection can be self-critical in a way that isn’t punishing—it’s enriching and growth inspiring. When collaborative projects go well, that creative process is genuinely fun.

The other place I feel the “why I stay” most strongly is in one-on-one research consultations. Those conversations allow space for vulnerability. Students open up when they feel comfortable, and that’s when you get to join them in part of their journey. That moment—just

connecting with another human being—can be both important and rewarding in a way that’s hard to quantify but easy to feel.

KC: I stay for the human connection too, but I’m also aware that my role and identity have expanded over time. Being an academic librarian is a big part of who I am, and I’ve reached a point where I can say that directly without apologizing for it. But I also know it can’t be all of me. I might show up at work as “100% librarian,” but when I go home, I try to leave that part in the office and not let it follow me. I have to remind myself that having a boundary like that is not a lack of commitment—it’s what makes the commitment sustainable.

RM: Oh yes, I resonate with that so deeply. Libraries often draw people who genuinely care about the position of libraries in society and in higher education, and I count myself among them. It can be hard to live in the middle ground between carrying everything and not caring at all. That’s where vocational awe shows up: You find yourself wondering why a colleague doesn’t care about something the way you do, and suddenly “caring” becomes a moral measuring stick. The trap is that vocational awe can feel like commitment, and it can be hard to become self-aware about it in the moment.

This makes me think of a situation at my last job where some colleagues surveyed students about their perceptions of the library. One student replied, “It’s just a library, my dudes.” That comment stuck with us and became a phrase we’d repeat whenever our work started to feel like the center of the universe. I encourage others to adopt it because it offers a sobering perspective. It doesn’t mean the work isn’t meaningful; it means we’re trying not to let meaning turn into martyrdom.

KC: That’s so grounding: “It’s just a library, my dudes.” I think higher education, as a culture, can become intensely mission-driven in ways that turn unhealthy fast. When “the mission” is treated like a constant moral emergency, urgency becomes normal, sacrifice becomes expected, and boundaries start to look like disloyalty. “It’s just a library, my dudes” is a reminder that we don’t have to position ourselves as the center of the world to justify our work. And when everything feels like a crisis, burnout isn’t a surprise—it’s the outcome.

RM: There’s also external pressure that feeds this, especially when institutions are under financial strain. In some environments, “student experience” becomes a retention strategy with revenue implications, and that pressure can make us feel like we must do more and more because the stakes feel existential. You can see it in the small moments, like extending a student consultation fifteen extra minutes because it will be “more helpful,” even when you have other responsibilities waiting. That impulse can feel like virtue, but it’s still self-sacrifice. In a profession that celebrates going above and beyond, it’s easy for self-sacrifice to become normalized and even reinforced in ways that are unhealthy.

KC: This leads into a spicy question I want us to consider: What’s a truth or thought you hold about librarianship that sounds cynical but is actually clarifying? My version of the clarifying cynicism is harder to phrase because it can sound like a dismissal when it’s not meant that way. The blunt version is: In academia, the bar can be low compared to corporate culture—and academia moves slowly. That can be frustrating, but it’s also a gift. The

pace of the semester, the layers of governance, and the structure of the institution can create time to iterate. It can create space to say, “No new projects for the rest of the year” or “Let’s finish what we started.”

RM: Wow, yes, that truth is clarifying because it reframes something people often criticize. Bureaucracy deserves critique, but it can also protect us from haste. We may feel frustrated by the pace, but most of the time, we aren’t hurried into rashness. It’s a privilege to be able to slow down,² rethink, revise, and make work sustainable. That slower pace also connects back to shared governance, which is so valuable and important. That kind of participation is rare in other sectors, and I think it’s part of what makes academic work feel worth doing. And as we reflect on why we stay in the profession, we also need to consider the other side: how we bring new people into librarianship.

KC: When we talk about retention, I keep coming back to how we invite people into librarianship in the first place. We owe prospective colleagues honesty about what the work is, how it functions, and what it costs. Academic hiring can feel needlessly secretive—like you’re supposed to endure it without ever being handed the rules. It doesn’t have to be that way. Transparency isn’t just a courtesy; it helps people decide if librarianship is what they want, and it lets them enter the field with expectations grounded in reality, not just idealism.

RM: Yes! I think about graduate students and early career librarians. People are entering the field after us, and things don’t have to be done the way they’ve always been done. When we’re imaginative and intentional about what it feels like to enter librarianship, it shapes culture and influences who stays, how they stay, and what “normal” becomes. There’s a difference between inviting someone into a profession and simply letting them survive it. This is where mentorship comes in—it helps demystify the hidden curriculum.

KC: I don’t want to dodge the tension here. I genuinely love this work, and I want to say that out loud. But we also know the structural realities, like tight job markets, uneven compensation, workload creep, and the gap between what grad school implies and what the job actually requires. That’s why the invitation matters. Not to discourage people but rather to be honest while still being enthusiastic.

RM: If we want people to stay, we can’t keep recruiting them into a story that only celebrates the halo. We have to invite people into the real work, including the meaning, the boundaries, the pace, the emotional labor, the parts that are joyful, and the parts that are hard. It’s better to enter with clarity than to enter with idealism that has the potential to result in burnout.

KC: Vocational awe has been a thread running through this whole conversation, so it feels fitting to end with one last question: What do we refuse to let vocational awe weaponize in our profession?

RM: I love helping people, and I’m unapologetic about that. I like helping people find what they need, and I find it fulfilling. It brings genuine happiness to my work. I also like being

the person in the room with the answer—or at least someone who can point the room in the right direction so we can get to the answer together. I do try to keep it in perspective, but I’m not interested in pretending that joy doesn’t matter.

KC: For me, the thing I refuse to let vocational awe weaponize is empathy. Empathy is part of what makes the work meaningful because it supports human connection, and human connection is what makes almost anything worth doing. But empathy also needs to be understood and personally regulated. If it isn’t, it can become a detriment—something that ruins you, ruins workplace culture, and poisons the environment you’re trying to make better. I want to keep empathy as a strength without letting it become a mechanism for self-erasure.

And I think that’s the simplest version of why we stay: not because librarianship is sacred but because it’s human. We stay for the moments of connection, the small gestures that change someone’s day, and the chance to build something better over time. We stay with our eyes open—loving the work enough to critique it and setting boundaries strong enough to make the love sustainable. ♪

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Retaining Library Employees

What Works?

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education has been grappling with the “Great Resignation” as employees leave jobs at higher rates than the industry has seen in years.¹ Although turnover rates seem to be slowing, they still exceed pre-pandemic levels, with 33% of employees indicating they would be looking for new jobs within the next year.² Employees that do stay may suffer from the “Great Detachment,” or generalized feelings of burnout.³ From search expenses and productivity decreases to loss of institutional knowledge and impacts on institutional culture, these resignations pose real costs to academic libraries and their institutions.

Against these headwinds, we wanted to know: What should our libraries do to retain employees? What does research (from within library literature and beyond) tell us about employee retention and today’s library workforce?

While there are many unknowns, there is some consensus about what makes a difference from an employee’s perspective. We summarize some of the best practices in employee retention and provide ideas about ways to make your library the kind of place where people want to stay.

Our recommendations vary as to who has the power of implementation. For example, all employees contribute to a colleague’s sense of belonging or can offer praise for a job well done. Other strategies are for managers or would require institutional policy change. We encourage you to consider how you might advocate “up” for some of these changes even when you aren’t in the position to implement them.

As you read through these suggestions, we offer several caveats. First, some turnover is good. People grow and want new challenges. Sometimes that means leaving for a new position. And new colleagues often bring fresh perspectives and ideas. Our recommendations aim to prevent environments and conditions that result in unnecessary turnover.

Second, as a companion to our suggestions, we recommend reading about toxicity in library culture and how underrepresented groups leave higher education at higher rates.⁴ Employees of color are significantly more likely to look for new employment in the next year compared to their white colleagues.⁵ Also, “not all staying is the same;” some retention may not be an indicator of a healthy workplace but rather “involuntary retention” for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) colleagues who would like to leave but don’t see an alternative.⁶

Karla Fribley is instructional technologies director and seminaries librarian at Earlham College, email: friblka@earlham.edu. Katherine Fish is the serials and electronic resources librarian at Macalester College, email: kfish@macalester.edu. Cary F. Gouldin is humanities and student success librarian at Wheaton College (MA), email: gouldin_cary@wheatoncollege.edu. Christi Taggart-Osterday is head of access services at the Sarah Lawrence College Library, email: costerday@sarahlawrence.edu.

Finally, there are some essential items missing from our list. Better compensation is the top factor valued by employees, full stop.⁷ If employees don't feel they are being paid a fair salary or receiving quality benefits, then other retention strategies will be limited in their success. Advocating for better benefits could include pushing for improved childcare policies, support for eldercare, higher employer retirement contributions, or more affordable health insurance. Improving compensation is a big lift that requires institutional change. In this article, we are focusing on smaller changes that may be easier to implement in your library, but that does not mean that you should ignore compensation.

With those caveats in mind, we grouped our recommendations into four broad categories: Ask Questions (and Act on the Answers), Institutionalize Work-Life Harmony, Invest in Your Staff, and Nurture a Positive Work Environment.

Ask Questions (and Act on the Answers)

Every context is different, so understanding the underlying conditions that are leading to turnover will help you figure out the next steps to take. Furthermore, having these conversations can itself build trust and strengthen communication between managers and employees. A word of warning, though: If you are going to ask questions, be responsive to the answers you receive. Otherwise, rather than gaining trust, you stand to lose it.

- **Stay interviews** – The point of stay interviews is to focus on what each employee needs to be happy and productive at work and to uncover what motivates them to stay.⁸ Unlike exit interviews (see below), stay interviews allow you to gather this information while you still have the opportunity to act on it to benefit the employee who provided it. Sample questions can be found in the ACRL Library Worker Retention Toolkit.⁹
- **Exit interviews** – Consider doing exit interviews internally to supplement those conducted by your institution. If departing employees are willing to share honest feedback about the challenges they experienced, that information can help you implement changes that will benefit remaining and future employees.¹⁰
- **Climate surveys** – Organizational climate plays a key role in employee satisfaction.¹¹ While stay and exit interviews provide important data from the perspective of individual employees, a climate survey can help you identify broader trends in your library—both strengths and areas for improvement. Furthermore, making them anonymous can encourage employees to be fully honest in a way they may not feel comfortable doing in a one-on-one conversation. Combat survey fatigue by making sure the survey is well designed and by sharing the results—and next steps—as promptly as possible.¹²

Institutionalize Work-Life Harmony

Rather than work-life *balance*, which assumes a split between the “work” self and the rest of one's identity and places the two in opposition, we use former US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy's framing of work-life *harmony*, which emphasizes the integration of work and nonwork demands through flexibility and autonomy.¹³

- **Boundaries** – Encourage regular breaks during the day, and normalize the use of vacation and sick time. Expecting engagement outside of work hours should be an exception, not a rule. When the need arises for employees to work beyond their normal schedule, make sure it is clearly communicated and understood.

- **Remote work** – There's a clear disconnect here between what employees want and what employers want to offer. One study found this was the second most common reason employees stated for wanting to seek new opportunities, with 54% of those who worked mostly on-site indicating dissatisfaction with their employer's remote work policies.¹⁴
- **Flexible schedules** – Allow employees to adjust their working hours to best suit their needs and preferences, and be flexible within that framework when events pop up that impact normal schedules. An emphasis on autonomy and respect has been shown to increase employee satisfaction and productivity.¹⁵

Invest in Your Staff

Investment includes things that have clear price tags, such as funding for conferences or workshops, but also includes broader strategies that help employees grow and feel engaged.

- **Professional development** – Often this gets cut when budgets shrink, but this is a key way to help employees feel valued and continue developing. A recent Gallup survey found employees who strongly believe they have support for professional growth are significantly more likely to stay at their employer.¹⁶ Beyond just providing funding for conferences, consider lobbying for training within the institution or promoting free webinars. Make sure employees feel they can take the time to support their professional growth.
- **... and make sure that includes training for managers** – Managers have a large impact on employees' sense of satisfaction and belonging. Encourage your institution to offer leadership training for managers, or support attendance in external programs.
- **Mentorship programs** – Consider how you help employees build their sense of belonging at an institution and who can help them grow. Larger schools may be able to build a mentorship structure within the library, whereas smaller schools may be able to look to other networks in the region or in a consortium. The three-volume set *Academic Library Mentoring: Fostering Growth and Renewal* can help institutions seeking ideas as to how to structure such a program.¹⁷

Nurture a Positive Work Environment

Just as students need to feel respected, valued, and safe in their campus' culture, these same factors are key to employee retention. Many of the strategies in this category should be led from the top. That said, a truly positive and welcoming environment can only be achieved through the intentions and actions of all employees.

- **Meeting culture** – Meetings are an essential part of our workday, but too many meetings are poorly planned, go off topic, run over, or just should have been an email. These meetings are a drag on morale, motivation, and productivity.¹⁸ Well-run and productive meetings in which all attendees' contributions are valued can go a long way in creating a positive environment. Effective meeting practices include sharing a well-planned agenda well in advance of the meeting; sharing notetaking, timekeeping, and scoping responsibilities; and designated no-meeting days.
- **Job duties** – Ensuring that employees have opportunities to work on projects that they are interested in and excited about is essential. Too often, as staff numbers shrink and workloads increase, library employees find themselves overworked and unable to focus on the part of their jobs they value the most. Regularly reviewing an employee's position to ensure that they can do the work they are truly interested in will give them a reason to stay.¹⁹

- **Culture of trust** – Trust is fundamental to all relationships, so it makes sense that it plays a critical role in the workplace. Studies have shown that retention is linked to whether employees trust their managers.²⁰ Many of the strategies discussed in other sections of this article, particularly the “Ask Questions” section, when done well, will improve trust between employees and library leadership. Additionally, making transparency and open communication a central part of your interactions with your employees is key. This means ensuring that employees understand administrative goals and priorities and are given opportunities to contribute to the decision-making process.²¹
- **Physical space** – One study found 79% of academic library employees agree that their physical work environment—comfortable workstations, well-regulated temperature, adequate lighting, a sensible layout, etc.—has a significant impact on their job satisfaction.²² Neglected employee spaces can be a drain on employee physical and mental well-being. Small changes, such as a fresh coat of paint, replacing broken or uncomfortable desk chairs, making workstations more ergonomic, a refresh to the employee break room, etc., can have a positive impact on employee satisfaction and productivity.
- **Feeling valued by colleagues** – There are many reasons employees may not feel appreciated and respected in their libraries. A significant barrier to all library employees feeling valued is the librarian/library staff divide. One study cited this as the biggest drain on library staff morale.²³ This divide is often institutionalized through library policies and practices. It is imperative that library leadership review both for unnecessary gate-keeping and work toward including library staff in planning and decision-making processes. Additionally, all of us with a library degree need to recognize the critical work done by library staff and treat them as truly equal colleagues. Another significant barrier is the reality that emotional and invisible labor is often disproportionately shouldered by some staff. BIPOC colleagues, for example, are often unofficial mentors to students of color. Other employees may routinely volunteer (or are voluntold) to do the thankless jobs—like clearing up after parties—that keep a library running smoothly, while others never volunteer. We should all be conscientious about stepping up to take on our fair share of that work and acknowledging our colleagues’ emotional and invisible work.
- **Positive feedback** – One study found almost 40% of higher education employees reported *not* receiving regular positive feedback even though this is strongly linked to retention.²⁴ Managers often focus on giving employees feedback on what they need to improve, but giving positive feedback is equally important. This feedback makes employees feel that their hard work is seen and valued. Positive feedback should be a significant part of the performance management process. It should also be given routinely throughout the year in both formal and informal interactions. This is another area in which all library employees have a role to play. Recognizing our colleagues’ ideas, hard work, and accomplishments can go a long way to creating a supportive work environment.
- **Social time** – Creating opportunities for employees to socialize can be a boon for creating a positive work environment and team building.²⁵ Enabling employees to connect with one another on a personal level helps create a foundation for collaboration and collegial working relationships. Gathering around food—particularly when subsidized by the library—promotes community and a shared feeling of value.²⁶ Social activities could include weekly coffee time, birthday celebrations, shared lunch hour, and field trips to campus events and spaces.

Closing Comments

These strategies must be contextualized by your unique library and your role within it. The larger ecosystem and culture of the institution will influence the scope of what is possible. No one person can apply everything, but the hope is that you will take a moment for honest introspection to discover what can be done to improve the workplace for current and future colleagues. Yes, some turnover is healthy and is not necessarily an indicator of institutional disfunction. However, working to improve the employee experience will help attract and keep top talent. We hope this list provides you with clear steps forward to improving the work environment within your library.

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Veronica Fu

Metadata and the Human Dimensions of Librarianship

Memory, Invisible Labor, and Professional Formation

Metadata is often treated as the invisible scaffolding of library systems—standardized, technical, and impersonal on its face. Yet beneath its structured fields lie traces of human labor, professional history, and the personal relationships that sustain our work as librarians. These dimensions don't always surface in formal description, but for those of us who encounter metadata daily, even a single catalog record can carry unexpected weight.

It was an ordinary moment in my workday: reviewing newly arrived East Asian titles in the catalog, scanning subject headings, and checking romanization and publication details before sending them on to shelf prep. Then I paused. A seemingly unremarkable record, just one among many I review each month, suddenly sparked recognition and meaning when I saw a familiar name in the main entry: Jing Liu. I already knew Liu, Chinese studies librarian at the University of British Columbia (UBC), had published a new book in Chinese titled *Zhen Zhen Gong Zu*. Through our professional community of East Asian librarians, I had followed the news with admiration, shared congratulations, and felt proud from afar. But seeing her name here, embedded in the structure of our own catalog at the University of Virginia Library, was different. It was no longer just news; it was real, local, present. The subject heading: Chinese—Canada—History, stood in MARC 650. Simple. Factual. And in that quiet moment surrounded by metadata, I felt something shift unexpectedly.

Metadata as Personal and Communal Memory

Catalog records are often reduced to neutral infrastructure—tools to describe, organize, and make materials discoverable. To most readers, therefore, the catalog entry is simply functional—an author, a title, and a subject heading. Yet encountering this record reminded me of my own connection to Liu, who has been a formative presence in my professional path, though not in formal ways. She is a mentor and model in the informal, often underacknowledged spaces of librarianship. Whether as a graduate student working at the Asian Library at UBC a decade ago or later as a colleague in the wider East Asian library community, I benefited from her guidance and generosity, offered without any expectation of recognition.

What moved me most, though, was the presence of the Chinese name in the parallel field. For me, it carried more than phonetic transcription; it was a sign of recognition, a reminder that our cultural background was not invisible. Its appearance alongside the English-language fields made the record feel less like an impersonal artifact of policy and system and more

Veronica Fu, formerly of the University of Virginia, is now East Asian studies and education librarian at the University of Notre Dame Hesburgh Libraries, email: rfu2@nd.edu.

like a bridge between worlds. It recalled the ways my professional life has been sustained not only by institutional structures but also by relationships—mentorship, collegiality, and community—often nurtured through shared language and heritage. In that moment, the record ceased to be a neutral entry and became instead a quiet marker of belonging, a place where personal identity and professional connection converged.

Metadata as Invisible Work

Behind the simplicity of the record lies a constellation of human effort: the scholar's research and writing, the library's acquisition, the cataloger's subject knowledge, and the institution's commitment to multilingual description. None of these roles, apart from the author's, are explicitly identified in the record. Examining each role more closely reveals how scholarly communication is sustained by many kinds of expertise, often unacknowledged but deeply essential.

Liu's book itself represents sustained intellectual labor—drawing on a donated collection to uncover the story of a Chinese immigrant family in Canada and connecting their experiences to broader histories of migration and settlement. The record also encodes the behind-the-scenes labor of librarianship. Acquisitions staff ensured the title was ordered and received. Catalogers provided the parallel fields in Chinese and English, carefully applying standards of romanization and subject access. Shelf-prep staff prepared the physical book for circulation. All this labor is condensed into a sparse set of fields that most users overlook—not out of neglect but out of a natural focus on their own research needs. Yet for those of us attuned to it, the work is visible, quietly present in every keystroke, every authority heading, every decision about how knowledge is framed.

Metadata as Professional History

Metadata also bears the imprint of professional history. The parallel English and Chinese fields in the record remind me of how far cataloging practice has evolved. Earlier generations of East Asian librarians worked under systems that permitted only romanization—often Wade-Giles for Chinese—leaving original scripts absent and sometimes distorting meaning. Later, the shift to pinyin brought its own complexities of retraining and standardization. The eventual inclusion of non-Latin scripts in catalogs marked another turning point, affirming the importance of representing works in their original language rather than only through transliteration.¹

Each of these shifts reflects more than technical adjustments. They mark institutional choices, cultural politics, and professional advocacy. They testify to the persistence of area studies librarians who argued for better representation of global languages within predominantly English-language systems. When I see both Chinese script and pinyin in a record today, I also see this longer arc of professional struggle and progress—an institutional memory embedded in our tools.

In the end, what seemed like a single catalog record held far more than bibliographic data. It revealed the human connections, layered labor, and professional histories that quietly shape how knowledge enters and endures within our libraries. *~*

Note

1. In fact, this history continues to develop: “Beginning October 1, 2025, the Library of Congress will launch a phased rollout to expand non-Latin script input beyond the MARC-8 repertoire.” This announcement can be accessed through Cataloging and Acquisitions (Library of Congress).

ACRL Honors the 2026 Award Recipients

A Recognition of Professional Achievement

ACRL is pleased to recognize the recipients of its 2026 awards. The annual presentation of ACRL's awards enables ACRL to honor the very best in academic and research librarianship.

Trevor A. Dawes Named 2026 ACRL Academic/Research Librarian of the Year

Trevor A. Dawes, vice Provost for libraries and museums and May Morris University Librarian at the University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press, is the 2026 ACRL Academic/Research Librarian of the Year. The award recognizes an outstanding member of the library profession who has made a significant national or international contribution to academic or research librarianship and library development.

"The committee named Trevor A. Dawes as the 2026 ACRL Academic/Research of the Year in recognition of his extraordinary, career-long service to ACRL and the profession, his influential scholarship, and his work to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion within the profession," said Melissa Autumn Wong, vice-chair of the ACRL Academic/Research Librarian of the Year Award Committee. "As one nominator noted, Dawes has contributed to ACRL 'at every conceivable level,' including as a committee member and chair, eight-time national conference committee member, national conference chair, member of the Board of Directors, and president of ACRL."

"Beyond ACRL, Dawes has served as an ALA Councilor and on the ALA Executive Board, in multiple leadership roles within the Association of Research Libraries, and in numerous other national, regional, and state-level professional organizations," Wong added. "Throughout his career, Dawes has worked to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in academic libraries and the profession. Nominators cited his publications and presentations, his work as a trainer and consultant, and his formal and informal mentorship of colleagues as having had a profound and lasting impact on equity work in libraries. As one nominator wrote, 'Trevor's outreach and engagement, scholarship, and direct and indirect mentorship on DEI topics leads the field.'"



Trevor A. Dawes

“I am deeply humbled by this recognition and grateful to those who took the time to nominate me and support my candidacy,” shared Dawes. “Your confidence in my work means more than I can express. This honor belongs equally to my extraordinary colleagues at the University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press, whose creativity, resilience, dedication, and commitment to our communities make meaningful work possible every day. While I have never pursued my work in the field for recognition, it is affirming to be seen and valued by peers and colleagues across our profession as a reminder of why the connections we build with one another matter so much.”

Dawes is a founding partner of the consulting firm Inclusive Knowledge Solutions and has worked in the academic library sector for more than 20 years, developing and delivering service-enhancing training and professional development initiatives that positively impact library-wide projects and programs. He facilitates workshops on leadership, organizational development, and diversity designed to strengthen the knowledge, skills, and competencies of library professionals. An author and presenter, Dawes has written or edited books, chapters, and articles, and has presented at local, national, and international conferences. His publications include work on leadership in academic libraries, diversity, and organizational development.

Dawes’s extensive record of service to ACRL includes being a member and chair of numerous committees, including chair of the Leadership, Recruitment, and Nominating Committee (2023-2024), chair of the Professional Development Coordinating Committee (2006-2009), and member of the Diversity Committee (2019-2021). His service to the ACRL conference includes eight terms on various conference committees and acting as chair of the ACRL 2019 Conference. Dawes served as a director-at-large on the ACRL Board of Directors (2012-2015) and was elected to serve as ACRL vice-president/president-elect (2012-2013), president (2013-2014), and past-president (2014-2015).

Dawes is also an active member of ALA and served as a member of ALA Council (2008-2011, 2015-2018) and the ALA Executive Board (2017-2020). He has served on a variety of ALA committees, including co-chairing the Task Force on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (2014-2016) and chairing the ALA Council Committee on Diversity (2006-2007).

“I am delighted to recognize Trevor A. Dawes with ACRL’s top individual award,” said ACRL Executive Director Teresa Anderson. “His commitment to scholarship, service, and mentoring has been a major asset to the profession over the course of his career. I particularly value Trevor’s tireless work advancing ACRL, including serving on conference committees and our Board of Directors.”

In addition to his service to ALA, Dawes served as a Board member (2022-25) and president (2024) of the Association of Research Libraries. He was Board chair of the Greater Western Library Alliance (2021) and served on the Boards of the Black Caucus of the American Library Association (2005-2007), National Information Standards Organization (2021-2027), NorthEast Research Libraries Consortium (2016-2024), and Center for Research Libraries (2025-2026).

Excellence in Academic Libraries Awards

The recipients of the 2026 Excellence in Academic Libraries awards are Flathead Valley Community College Library, Kalispell, Montana, and the University of Delaware Library,

Museums and Press, Newark, Delaware. Started in 2000, the Excellence in Academic Libraries Awards recognizes academic librarians and staff who work together as a team to develop academic libraries that are outstanding in furthering the educational missions of their institutions.

“I am thrilled that ACRL is again highlighting the many important contributions that academic libraries make to their institutions,” said ACRL Executive Director Teresa Anderson. “The 2026 award recipients exemplify strong commitment to innovation, scholarship, collaboration, and community. Receiving an Excellence in Academic Libraries Award is a tribute to each library and its entire staff for outstanding services, programs, and leadership.”

The Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC) Library received the Excellence in Academic Libraries award for the Community and Junior College Libraries category.

“The Library at Flathead Valley Community College has outstanding collaborations with internal campus units and external community partners, all in support of the Flathead Valley Community College,” shared Beth McNeil, chair of the ACRL Excellence in Academic Libraries Committee. “The library is a true community hub, with a small but mighty staff!”

The library impressed the award committee with its ability to be nimble and adaptive, focusing on community building through conversations with patrons to constantly improve offerings. Three recent examples include the creation of the FVCC Archives, redesign of the One Button Studio, and cofounding the Small Libraries Interest Group in collaboration with The University of Montana Western. The library additionally developed a Makerspace for students, looking for coursework and program offerings to guide the acquisition of technology items in the space. The space is well-stocked with innovative technology, such as a GlowForge laser engraver, resin and filament 3D printers, sewing machines, stained glass, button makers, custom form makers, and more.

“We are beyond honored to receive the ACRL Excellence in Academic Libraries Award for Community & Junior College Libraries,” said Morgan Ray, FVCC director of library services. “Serving FVCC students, employees, and our local community has always been our north star, and we are proud and thankful to see this work recognized in the larger library community. As an academic community college library, we see learners of all ages come through our doors, from Makerspace events to author talks and 1:1 research instruction. We are honored to represent Montana and rural community colleges. We pride ourselves on our ability to be nimble and adaptive to help move the conversation from passive consumption of information to knowledge creation and application. Receiving this award is a sign that we continue to move in the right direction.”

The University of Delaware (UD) Library, Museums and Press received the Excellence in Academic Libraries award for the University Libraries category.



Staff of the Flathead Valley Community College Library

“The University of Delaware Library has impressive initiatives underway, including with AI, intensive data analysis, first year students and undergraduate research initiatives, intellectual freedom programming, and partnerships with creative communities, demonstrating sustained excellence and always connected the university mission,” McNeil noted.



University of Delaware Library, Museums and Press staff

The UD Library, Museums and

Press centers this mission to cultivate learning, develop knowledge, and foster the free exchange of ideas through innovative programs that directly advance strategic priorities as a major research university committed to outstanding undergraduate education and societal impact. A collaboration with faculty on the Delaware Humanities-funded “Black Entrepreneurship in Wilmington” project demonstrates this commitment by uncovering previously hidden histories that enrich the understanding of Delaware’s diverse communities while addressing the university’s charge to engage with the state’s critical needs.

“To receive this recognition during such a demanding period for higher education and libraries makes it all the more meaningful,” stated Trevor A. Dawes, vice provost for libraries and museums and May Morris University Librarian. “The award is a testament to the resilience and dedication of my colleagues across the Library, Museums and Press who, despite the pressures we face, continue to advance teaching, learning, and research, deepening our commitments to open scholarship, experiential learning, and research support, while showing up for our campus and broader community in ways that are genuinely meaningful. I couldn’t be more proud of what we’ve built together.”

“As a welcoming hub of scholarship and intellectual freedom, UD’s Library, Museums and Press brings our mission to life every day,” UD President Laura Carlson shared in congratulating the Library, Museums and Press on this recognition. “They infuse creativity and collaboration into everything they do—from showcasing our exceptional primary sources and special collections to expanding digital resources, open educational materials and more. We’re incredibly proud of their work and deeply grateful for this well-earned recognition.”

Interim Provost William Farquhar echoed this sentiment, stating “The Library, Museums and Press has a transformative impact across the University. As just one example, their leadership in AI literacy addressed its pedagogical and ethical dimensions, ensuring that faculty and students engage with it critically and effectively. Thanks to their work, our graduates are better prepared for leadership in an increasingly complex world.”

Section Awards

CJCLS Community College Library Leadership Award

Recipient: Nelson Santana, associate professor / deputy chief and collection development librarian at Bronx Community College of the City University of New York. This award recognizes significant achievement in community college leadership. Santana was selected

for his scholarly work and his extensive service to the profession through local and national organizations.

CJCLS Community College Library Program Award

Recipient: Living Law Project, an annual event from Paul H. Thompson Library at Fayetteville Technical Community College. This award recognizes significant achievement in outreach or academic programs in community college libraries. The Living Law Project was selected due to its community collaboration and the team's and partners' commitment to student success.

CLS Innovation in College Libraries Award

Recipients: Tristan MK Draper, student success and engagement librarian at Beloit College and Mary Elizabeth Schiavone, student success and engagement librarian and federal depository coordinator, also at Beloit College, for Librarians Spill the Tea Podcast. This award recognizes small to mid-sized college or university library workers who demonstrate innovation in library services related to the ACRL Plan for Excellence.

DOLS Distance Learning Librarianship Award

Recipient: Jodi Poe, head of Library Services and editor of the *Journal of Library & Information Services in Distance Learning* at Jacksonville State University. This award honors an individual who has contributed to the success of distance and online learning librarianship through a specific project or initiative related to library service in higher education.

EBSS Distinguished Education and Behavioral Sciences Librarian Award

Recipient: Rachael Elrod, associate chair, departmental libraries, and director of the Education Library at the University of Florida. This award honors an academic librarian who has made an outstanding contribution as an education and/or behavioral sciences librarian through professional and scholarly accomplishments and service to the profession.

IS Ilene F Rockman Instruction Publication of the Year Award

Recipient: Darren Ilett, associate professor / teaching and learning librarian at the University of Northern Colorado for "Academic Libraries, Counter-Storytelling, and Minoritized Students' Scholarly Identity Development" (*Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 24, no 4, (October 2024): 765-87, <https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2024.a938742>). This award recognizes an outstanding publication related to instruction in a library environment published in the preceding two years and honors Ilene F. Rockman's professional contributions to academic librarianship in the area of information literacy.

IS Innovation Award

Recipients: Samantha LeGrand, clinical assistant professor and instruction and design librarian at the Purdue University Libraries and School of Information Studies; Jing Lu, clinical assistant professor at the Purdue University Libraries and School of Information Studies; and Zoeanna Mayhook, assistant professor and business information specialist at the Purdue University Libraries and School of Information Studies, for the Partners for Algorithmic Literacy (PAL) project. This award recognizes a project that demonstrates creative, innovative, or unique approaches to information literacy instruction or programming.

IS Miriam Dudley Instruction Librarian Award

Recipient: Kristina Clement, assistant director of academic engagement and instruction, collegiate librarians at the Kennesaw State University Libraries . This award recognizes an individual academic or research librarian who has built a record of contributions that have advanced the pursuit of teaching and learning. The award honors Miriam Dudley, whose pioneering efforts led to the formation of the ACRL Instruction Section (formerly ACRL Bibliographic Instruction Section).

PPIRS Marta Lange Award

Recipient: Jenny McBurney, government publications librarian and regional depository coordinator at the University of Minnesota Libraries. This annual award recognizes an academic or law library workers who, through research, service to the profession, or other creative activity, makes distinguished contributions to bibliography and information service in law or political science. The award honors Marta Lange, 1990-91 Law and Political Science Section (LPSS) Chair, whose exceptional talents as a leader were enhanced by a wonderful collegial spirit.

ULS Outstanding Professional Development Award

Recipients: Matthew Kibbee, evidence synthesis coordinator at the Cornell University Library; Megan Kocher, science and evidence synthesis librarian at the University of Minnesota Libraries; Amy Riegelman, social sciences and evidence synthesis librarian at the University of Minnesota Libraries; and Sarah Young, social sciences librarian and director of the evidence synthesis program at the Carnegie Mellon University Libraries, for the Evidence Synthesis Institute program. This award recognizes library, archives, or museum workers whose contributions to providing professional development opportunities for academic libraries have been especially noteworthy or influential. ♪

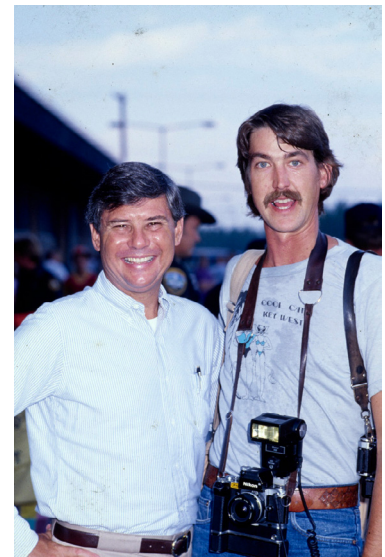
On February 13, 2026, the California State University, Long Beach University Library hosted a press conference announcing a federal \$2.175 million community project funding sponsored by Congressman Robert Garcia. Garcia visited the library to formally present the funding, which will support the modernization, digitization, and expansion of the library's Special Collections area. He noted that the federal funds would serve as the foundation of a new Long Beach Research Center within the library, "offering hands-on training in archival methods, digitization techniques, and historical research to the public" while ensuring that students can access and study research materials "in a dynamic learning environment." In addition to expanding the archives' online presence, the plan includes making mainly cosmetic changes to the current space by adding glass walls to open sightlines and converting the adjoining storage room into exhibit and classroom space. More details are available at <https://www.csulb.edu/news/article/new-funding-propels-csulbs-storied-archives-toward-wider-access>.



Rep. Robert Garcia (center) presented \$2.175 million in federal funding to CSULB administration and Dean of Library Elizabeth Dill (right).

Acquisitions

The Florida State University (FSU) Libraries Special Collections and Archives has opened an extensive collection of photographs donated by local photojournalist Mark Wallheiser. Spanning decades of Florida history, it includes millions of photographic prints, negatives, film slides, and digital images. Among its highlights are images of campus life at FSU, Florida A&M University, and Tallahassee State College (formerly Tallahassee Community College), as well as photographs of professional and collegiate sports, natural disasters, and significant events in the capital city. Over the past year, the FSU Libraries Special Collections and Archives team has developed detailed online descriptions of the collection and digitized a selection of negatives. Wallheiser and the libraries envision the collection becoming a valuable resource for researchers, scholars, students, and educators. Learn more about the collection at <https://fsuspecialcollections.wordpress.com/2025/02/12/the-mark-wallheiser-photograph-collection/>.



Mark Wallheiser (right) with Florida Governor Bob Graham (left), now part of the newly added photographic archive in the FSU Libraries Special Collections and Archives. (FSU Special Collections and Archives)

The University of California (UC), Davis, has received three significant collections of coffee-related materials that together illuminate the history, science, and global impact of specialty coffee. The donations to the UC Davis Library are from Gerald “Jerry” Baldwin, co-founder of Starbucks and former president of Peet’s Coffee; Russ Kramer, president of Hacienda La Minita and veteran of Green Mountain Coffee; and the Specialty Coffee Association (SCA). The materials—including rare books, photographs, business records, and other archival materials—provide a comprehensive record of coffee’s evolution from agricultural commodity to global consumer product. The UC Davis Coffee Center is the first academic research and teaching facility in the United States dedicated entirely to the study of coffee. Learn more at <https://library.ucdavis.edu/news/coffee-legends-create-a-world-class-collection-at-the-uc-davis-library/>.

The Library of Congress has acquired the complete collection of music manuscripts of jazz bandleader, arranger, pianist, and composer Gil Evans (1912–88). Evans is widely remembered as one of the greatest orchestrators in the history of jazz and is celebrated for his collaborations with legendary jazz trumpeter, composer, and bandleader Miles Davis (1926–91). This archive contains a vast collection of Evans’ compositions and arrangements, much of it in his own handwriting. The collection includes approximately 350 scores, 35 lead sheets, 5 music sketches, and 50 instrumental parts for works Evans created for recording projects between 1947 and 1987. Lead sheets are a condensed, single-staff musical notation that provides only the essential elements of a song. Learn more at <https://bit.ly/4de64B6>. *zz*



The first delivery vehicle for Starbucks—used to haul construction materials and, later, coffee beans for delivery—was a 1955 Chevrolet with a busted headlight. (UC Davis Library Archives and Special Collections/Jerry Baldwin Papers, D-816)

Chelsea S. Dinsmore is now the associate dean for resources and discovery at the University of Central Florida Libraries.

Meghan Ryan Guthorn is now deputy state librarian and chief of collections and archives at the Library of Virginia.

Aubrey Hobby was recently appointed director of governmental and external affairs at the Library of Virginia.

Anamika Lal has joined the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill University Libraries' "On the Books" initiative as data specialist.

Thomas Padilla is now associate dean of research and learning at the University of Nebraska.

Vashti Jenkins Taylor was recently appointed as a UCF Connect Librarian at the University of Central Florida Libraries.

Mariah Wahl has been appointed metadata librarian at the University of Washington Libraries.

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