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Peer-Reviewed Article

Listening, Learning, Accommodating: A Critical Look at Inclusive Research Help

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ABSTRACT

Research consultations continue to be a valuable means of connecting with users and supporting their research needs. As we've received an increasing number of research consultations where one or more accommodations have been requested, the Kennesaw State University Libraries have been exploring ways to provide accommodations in research consultations. Since there is a lack of research on this specific facet of research consultations, this literature review focuses on the related topics of assistive technology in libraries, accommodations in library services and spaces, and library anxiety to show how these topics relate to providing accommodations in research consultations. The objective of this literature review is to show what research there is related to the topic of accommodations in research consultations and to start a larger conversation around this topic.

KEYWORDS

Research consultations, accommodations, reference services, academic libraries

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Introduction

Research consultations, or research appointments, are a service many academic libraries have been providing for years. These consultations provide opportunities for librarians to work with users one-on-one or in small groups and deliver in-depth research assistance and guidance specific to the user's research topic (Magi & Marduesz, 2013). A central goal of research consultations and appointments is to assist users in locating resources and accessing information as they conduct research. In pursuing this goal, individual user needs like disability-related accommodations may be overlooked, which can impact the overall effectiveness of a research consultation. If a user wants or needs an accommodation to get the most out of a research appointment, is the library ready and able to support that user and their specific needs?

The Kennesaw State University Libraries have been providing research consultations for several years, and in 2021 we began offering specific accommodations for them. The accommodations users can currently request for their research consultation includes note taking, enlarged text, live captioning in online appointments, and the use of a screen reader. By adding a field to our research consultation request form that says, "if you want to request accommodations, please select from the following options," we offer a way for our users to request accommodation when they schedule an appointment. While this is a great initiative that continues to support the needs of our users, there was no record or documentation of how these accommodations were being supported. Unfortunately, literature on this topic is extremely limited at this time (Flak & Harding, 2025). This article reviews literature on and related to providing accommodations in research consultations and looks at how libraries are supporting the needs of differently-abled users in various contexts besides consultations. The goal of this article is to start a larger conversation about providing accommodations during research consultations.

Language

Language shapes perceptions and impacts inclusion. Many neurodivergent communities, including Autistic, Blind, and Deaf communities, generally prefer Identity-First Language (IFL) (e.g., *Autistic person*) because it affirms identity and culture. Our preference aligns with these community trends toward IFL unless a community prefers Person-First Language (PFL) (e.g., *person with Down syndrome*). Our commitment remains to respect individual and community voices in all work. We recommend that others who have questions consult the American Library Association (ALA) *Accessible Communication Styles*, respect the preferences of individual people, and when uncertain, ask respectfully when appropriate to the situation (Pineo, 2025).

Background Information on Research Consultations and Appointments

There are numerous ways to define research consultations in scholarly literature, but Magi and Marduesz's (2013) definition is general and inclusive. They define research consultations as "a reference service in which the librarian meets with a student (or several students who are working together on a group project) in a scheduled session away from the reference desk" (p. 605). Their definition only mentions students as research consultation users when faculty and staff could also benefit from having a research consultation, but otherwise it is a good and broad understanding of the service. Research consultations are often seen as an extension of reference services, where an individual or small group can get in-depth research assistance that focuses on their specific needs (Magi & Marduesz, 2013). Historically, many libraries have provided this type of service for decades. Services like this first started appearing in the literature in the 1970s and 1980s, but it could be argued that "term paper clinics" were the first iteration of this kind of service (Savage, 2015, p. 578). The Kennesaw State University Libraries provide in-person and online research consultations that are scheduled for one hour and are available to all Kennesaw State University students, faculty, and staff.

Upon reviewing the literature on research consultations, only one article was found that mentions providing accommodations during these appointments (Flak & Harding, 2025). Flak and Harding's article focuses on using University Design for Learning (UDL) as a framework and applying that to research consultations (2025). This includes recommendations like "making it easy for your audience to see, hear, and reach out to you" and providing your audience with multiple means of representation (2005, p.105). Because of the lack of literature directly related to our topic, our group also researched the use of assistive technology in libraries, accommodations in other library services, and accommodations related to library spaces. We also researched library anxiety as it relates to users' perceptions of libraries and how that impacts the usage of library services, like research consultations (Brown, 2011; Lund, 2020).

Assistive Technologies in Libraries

The integration and effective use of assistive technology, or tools designed to enhance the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities, are critical in ensuring that all patrons have equitable access to research consultations and other services. According to the Assistive Technology Act of 1998, assistive technology (also commonly called "adaptive technology") consists of "any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities" (Booth, 2012, p. 14).

Assistive technologies come in all shapes and forms. Mishra (2023) identifies various types that are crucial in library settings, including screen readers, Optical Character Recognition (OCR), Braille displays, electronic magnifiers, voice assistants, mobile apps, tactile graphics, and navigation systems (p. 2). These technologies are essential for providing access to information and resources for individuals with disabilities, ensuring that they can participate fully in academic and research activities. Screen readers, for instance, convert text displayed on a screen into speech, making digital content accessible to visually impaired users. In the digital age, these tools are critical to providing accessibility for students doing research.

One of the most studied and implemented areas of assistive technology in libraries is the accessibility of databases and websites. Despite advancements, significant gaps remain in this area. Tatomir and Durrance (2010, as cited in Rysavy, 2020) evaluated the accessibility of library databases to adaptive technology users and discovered that a majority of the 32 databases audited were not accessible and failed to meet basic accessibility requirements (p. 73). Willis & O'Reilly (2020) tested database vendors on accessibility criteria and found that of the 227 databases tested, only ten fully matched the claims made on the Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT) for the 11 criteria assessed. The biggest barriers to accessibility were related to downloadable files' OCR, skip navigation, transcripts, and alternative text (p. 8). Finally, Rybin Koob (2022) examined multiple digital accessibility tools, including screen readers, and found that there were several common issues that made them unusable, including incorrectly labeled elements, elements not accessible to screen readers, or things simply not programmed correctly that proved to be barriers to those needing this technology (p. 10). These findings indicate that libraries cannot rely solely on vendors to implement this technology. They need to actively evaluate and address accessibility gaps beyond vendor claims. Libraries must conduct regular accessibility audits and work closely with technology vendors to ensure that their digital resources are fully accessible to all users.

Mishra (2023) outlines a framework for implementing assistive technology in libraries, emphasizing a community-centered approach (p. 6). Similarly, Booth (2012) suggests that the most important step is understanding the needs of the community served (p. 21). Libraries should engage with their patrons to identify specific accessibility needs and preferences. This can be achieved through surveys, focus groups, and direct consultations with users who have disabilities. By involving the community in the decision-making process, libraries can ensure that the assistive technologies they implement are relevant and effective.

The implementation of assistive technology is often hindered by various barriers, including accessibility awareness, infrastructure and resources, compatibility and integration, and accessibility barriers in library resources. Mishra (2023) discusses how "Libraries need to have the necessary infrastructure, such as accessible workstations, devices, and software, to support the implementation of assistive technologies. Limited resources and budget constraints can pose challenges in acquiring and maintaining these technologies." (p. 4). One of the most discussed barriers to implementing this technology in libraries was staff training and education. Mulliken (2017, as cited in Michalak & Rysavy, 2020) noted that librarians often lack training in disability services, which affects their ability to confidently assist Blind users with screen readers and adaptive technologies (p. 298). This gap in staff knowledge and training further complicates the effective implementation of assistive technologies.

While the literature extensively covers some assistive technologies in libraries, there is a limited focus on their application in research consultations specifically. Additionally, the literature heavily focuses on website accessibility, often overlooking other forms of adaptive technologies. This gap highlights the need for more targeted research to understand how assistive technologies can be better integrated into research consultations to support users with disabilities.

Accommodations and Library Services

When discussing accommodations and library services, studies generally focus on accommodations in instruction, both synchronous and asynchronous. Research has found that instruction and instruction materials using a form of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) benefits students with and without disabilities. UDL is a framework for designing learning experiences that accommodate individual student needs, including students with disabilities, different learning styles, and backgrounds (Zhong, 2012).

Studies have looked at a variety of different ways to use UDL in library instruction. Some examples include redesigning LibGuides (online research guides) into tutorial modules and ensuring that PowerPoint presentations are accessible and meet ADA requirements (Webb & Hoover, 2015; Zhong, 2012). These studies have shown that applying UDL to library instruction not only benefits students with reported or immediately apparent disabilities but also students with no reported or immediately apparent disabilities (Zhong, 2012). This is important because prior research has generally focused on apparent disabilities, while ignoring disabilities that are not as apparent (Roberson et al., 2022). Proactively implementing UDL when developing instruction materials benefits all users and alleviates the need for students to disclose a non-apparent disability (Roberson et al., 2022).

Law and professional guidelines provide us with structure and ideas on how to accommodate students with disabilities, but we should aim not only to meet these policies but to go beyond what is legally required of us to meet student needs (Whitver 2000). To do that, librarians must make services accessible to students with varied disabilities as "noted by the American Library Association (ALA) in 2009, [though] there has been little discussion of expanding the concept of accessibility beyond what is required by laws like the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act," and the specific needs of neurodivergent users tend to be an afterthought or ignored altogether (Ellis, 2005, p. 253).

Whitver (2000) discourages simply "retrofitting" established structures because the accommodations process can be burdensome and "other[ing]" for students with disabilities (pp. 383-384). Instead, it is suggested that instructors integrate social justice principles into the initial design, utilizing UDL to create learning experiences that will enhance learning for everyone while still centering disabilities. This helps minimize reliance on student disclosure and to ensure a more level playing field for all users. However, even when libraries are responding to accessibility needs rather than proactively meeting them, they can uncover specific issues by working with users with disabilities. Although these suggestions were specifically about library instruction, including asynchronous materials like LibGuides and tutorials, they could also apply to research consultations.

Working closely with students with disabilities can pinpoint accessibility problems in libraries, thereby allowing librarians to tackle these problems and meet student needs. In their initial literature review, Rysavy & Michalak (2020) detail the experience of a library director and director of institutional research evaluating the accessibility of their electronic resources, which was precipitated by the university and library having their first Blind student. This required them to get up to speed on accessibility best practices. There is a history of students with disabilities filing complaints when academic libraries do not provide equal access to digital content, and libraries have not always been proactive about assuring this access. Rysavy & Michalak discussed a 2015 survey on web accessibility conducted by Utah State University which revealed LibGuides' accessibility stayed the same or got worse in LibGuides 2.0, which is concerning (2020). They also cited the Tatomir Accessibility Checklist (TAC), an evaluation tool which focuses on important features users of adaptive technology use and assesses the presence or absence of these features within library databases (Rysavy & Michalak, 2020).

Databases and library websites can take a long time to load using assistive technology. Some solutions include implementing VPATs to uncover partial compliance. WAVE (Web Accessibility Evaluation Tools), a series of evaluation tools that helps make content more accessible, uncovers red flags, and the authors used that to audit their electronic resources (e.g., Gale Power Search, ProQuest Academic Central, Springshare: LibGuides and A-Z Databases, and JSTOR). From this, they discovered that they needed a browser extension for it to work with OpenAthens. A-Z Databases had 149 errors, EBSCO 88, and the average was 31.3. Their solution was to work with vendors for resolutions and conduct a usability study with a Blind student worker (Rysavy & Michalak, 2020).

Continuing their research in their second column in the series, Michalak & Rysavy (2020) conducted a usability study with a Blind student worker using JAWS, an assistive technology used for screen reading. They found that expanding side menus caused problems because they do not read the way links do (although links can be inserted to help); documents not scanned with OCR are unreadable, and many images did not have alternative text. They included another literature review focusing on adaptive technology. The problems they found included searching for full text without being sure that PDFs were scanned with OCR and linked full-text articles (which are not identifiable as accessible). They also found that lack of empathy for students by staff was common but better among librarians with disabilities themselves. The usability study compared EBSCO and ProQuest, with the latter faring better. Although they were not writing specifically for research consultations, their findings are relevant to ensuring access and accessibility for e-resources that may be shown to students in consultations.

Other studies discuss accessibility and the ways to make materials and resources available to everyone. For instance, Applin (1999) covers relevant areas such as preparation (proactive), communication, training, and assistive technology, and the problem of a lack of disclosure and knowledge of student needs. Learning preferences and options for different modalities should be taken into account, and handouts and visual aids with jargon avoided or explained should be provided. The importance of communication and training remains applicable.

In addition to more apparent disabilities, such as low vision and blindness, those with non-apparent disabilities and neurodivergent users are also crucial to consider when implementing accommodations in libraries. McMullin and Walton (2019) focus on how to inform all library workers regarding traits common to the autism spectrum. For research help specifically, they give advice on how to approach face-to-face interactions, taking into consideration the way Autistic students might think and approach assignments and tasks. It is important to keep in mind that autism is a non-apparent disability; people will not necessarily know whether a student has autism when interacting with them before or during the research consultation. Students are not required to self-disclose, and the presentation of traits common to autism will vary due to the wide range and non-linear aspect of the autism spectrum. A variety of factors affect this and students' diagnoses, including but not limited to gender and age. For instance, women and older students are more likely to be socially conditioned to and practiced at masking and often present differently (Belcher, et al., 2023, p. 3119). McMullin and Walton's (2019) book has suggestions and guidelines for interacting with Autistic students. For example, asking questions is important and generally good practice when working with any patron. However, it is important to keep in mind our limitations while behaving in a professional manner and treating students with respect, remembering that we are not qualified to diagnose students with any disability, nor should we ask them if they have a diagnosis (p. 31). Instead, we can look for some signs common to the autism spectrum. Some students might exhibit an "unusual flow of conversation and lack of back-and-forth dialogue" as well as certain cognitive strengths (McMullin and Walton, 2019, p. 31-32). Generally, librarians and instructors "have not found interactions to be more difficult than working with neurotypical students, just a bit different" (McMullin and Walton, 2019, p. 34), and McMullin and Walton (2019) suggest using direct language, informing students of rules, and asking concrete questions (p. 38). Being aware of "executive functioning, particularly multitasking/mental flexibility" is important, because "Not everyone can take notes and actually absorb the content simultaneously" (McMullin and Walton, 2019, p. 41). While apparent disabilities may be easier to identify and meet, it is just as critical to meet those with non-apparent disabilities by learning about them and creating accommodations tailored to them.

A combination of UDL and learning about specific disability needs had the potential to greatly improve library services where users interact with a library's tools and librarians, such as in research consultations. While UDL offers a way to proactively meet the needs of users with or without disabilities, working closely with or learning about users with disabilities can help target accessibility gaps in library services. Similarly, this approach may be applied to library spaces.

Accommodations in Library Spaces

In the United States, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) establishes guidelines for making spaces accessible to individuals with disabilities and sets minimum legal requirements for compliance. Meeting the minimum expectations of ADA regulations means having things like wheelchair ramps, handicap accessible doors and bathrooms, and having Braille signage in buildings (Kowalsky & Woodruff, 2017; Samson, 2011; Schomberg & Corley, 2022). While companies and businesses are only required to meet the minimum expectations, those expectations do not cover the wide variety of accessibility needs that users may have. Libraries, like many other organizations and businesses, must comply with ADA regulations, but meeting the minimum requirements does not always meet the needs of all library users or make the library truly accessible or inclusive.

Historically, library spaces were often built with a specific use in mind and ADA regulations were seen as something that needed to be met but not necessarily surpassed (Kowalsky & Woodruff, 2017; Schomberg & Corley, 2022). In more recent years, studies have been conducted in libraries with the goal of creating spaces with specific user needs in mind. This can be seen in the literature where libraries have created spaces that are either more inclusive and welcoming to a wider variety of users or spaces that specifically target the needs of neurodivergent users (Cox, 2023; Walton & McMullin, 2021). This section of the literature review focuses on studies that mentioned creating or redesigning physical spaces for specific user groups, so we could learn about what we could potentially incorporate into our research consultation service and our consultation rooms.

Many libraries have done studies or gone through redesigns in an effort to make their buildings and spaces more accessible. These studies and redesigns have often focused on complying with ADA regulations, like making sure the aisles between stacks are wide enough for wheelchairs, walkers, and strollers; or providing seating and tables that are at various heights (Samson, 2011; Schomberg & Corley, 2022). Sometimes library spaces are rethought or modified after observing that the needs of their users are not being met, and sometimes spaces are changed to meet new user needs when the original use for the space is no longer relevant. These are two of the most common reasons for changing library spaces that other researchers have published on in the past, but in recent years there have been a few studies on redesigning library spaces that focus on going beyond ADA compliance to meet user needs that had not been considered previously but are becoming more common.

A common theme of accessibility is known as the “curb cut” effect. This phenomenon is likened to the practice of cutting a slope into a curb to make it wheelchair accessible to fulfill ADA requirements. However, cutting curbs makes sidewalks easier to use for many people who do not use wheelchairs (like parents with children in strollers) (Karp, 2011; Slagus, 2024). Likewise, focusing on the accessibility needs of one group of students with disabilities can result in changes that benefit all students. Librarians at West Chester University researched ways they could make their academic library more welcoming for Autistic students (Walton & McMullin, 2021). Other libraries have done studies and created spaces that take the sensory needs of neurodivergent users into account (Schomberg & Corely, 2022). While this may seem like a very specific user group to focus on, one of the studies noted that the 2015 National Autism Indicators Report stated that “36% of young adults on the autism spectrum attended postsecondary education” (Roux et al., 2015, as cited in Walton & McMullin, 2021, p. 57). This data confirms that Autistic students have been part of higher education for years and will continue to be, and their needs should be considered and accounted for in some way. Walton and McMullin (2021) identify sensory processing challenges as one of two main factors impacting Autistic students’ ability to use library spaces. Sensory processing challenges relate to the sounds, lights, smells, and other sensory experiences within a space. Walton and McMullin’s study emphasizes the creation of spaces that reduce or provide users with some control over sensory experiences that can potentially cause discomfort or even pain for users (Walton & McMullin, 2021). ASD has a very strong relationship with sensory processing challenges that can include hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity (McMullin & Walton, 2019; Walton & McMullin, 2021). For hypersensitive people, things like smells, colors, and sounds are often stronger, brighter, or louder, which can cause stronger reactions to these stimuli (McMullin & Walton, 2019; Walton & McMullin, 2021). By comparison, hyposensitive people can be attracted to or even seek out these kinds of stimuli, which can cause distractions (Walton & McMullin, 2021). Walton and McMullin’s research even includes reports where Autistic students said they avoided certain spaces that tended to overstimulate them, and some reported that their sensory sensitivities interfered with their ability to study (2021). Having low sensory spaces or technology that can help moderate or mitigate stimuli can make library spaces more inclusive for Autistic students and other users with similar needs (Walton & McMullin, 2021; Cox, 2023).

While none of the sources we came across specifically mentioned spaces where research consultations are held, one source did look at the design of academic library study spaces. The source mentioned that the study spaces in academic libraries can “influence student engagement, sense of belonging, development of agency and motivation for academic success” (Schomberg & Corely, 2022, p. 574). While a research consultation space is not the same as a study space, it is not a stretch to assume that the space these consultations are held in can impact how the consultation goes and what the user gets out of it. It makes sense to consider not only how research consultations are being conducted but also where they are being conducted and how the location impacts the research consultation. Accessibility is about making sure students can use resources and services with minimal to no barriers, but sometimes other factors create additional usage hurdles.

Library Anxiety

Library anxiety has the potential to impact research consultations in academic libraries. While direct studies on library anxiety and research consultations are limited, insights from library anxiety research related to reference desk interactions offer useful parallels, suggesting that similar challenges and strategies may apply in the context of research consultations.

The concept of library anxiety was first introduced by Constance Mellon in 1986 and later refined by many, including Sharon Bostick in 1992. Brown (2011) provides a comprehensive overview of the foundational work of Mellon (1986) and Bostick (1992), who respectively identified and measured library anxiety, with Bostick developing the Library Anxiety Scale. Brown's (2011) review of the literature revealed that most agree "that library anxiety is comprised of a user's lack of familiarity and confidence in using the library, which contributes to feelings of inadequacy" (p. 310). In addition to summarizing the literature on library anxiety, Brown (2011) also points out that much of the literature on library anxiety takes a deficit approach and focuses on "weaknesses in library services as opposed to the efforts that go into creating and implementing new processes, services, and programming" (p. 312). Brown recommends reference librarians as prime candidates to help combat library anxiety for students given their ability to adapt, change, and innovate new services.

Nieves-Whitmore (2021) connects library anxiety to the design of academic library spaces, noting that library design influences the comfort of the user. Nieves-Whitmore (2021) draws an important connection between the perceptions and expectations of students about "what a library 'is' and 'should' be," and the anxiety students may experience about using the library, which highlights both personal and psychological factors of anxiety (p. 495). These perceptions, expectations, and psychological factors extend to the consultation environment itself. A well-designed consultation space—whether physical or virtual—should feel welcoming and accessible. Similar to Nieves-Whitmore's attention to the psychological factors behind library anxiety, McAfee (2018) connects Helen Block Lewis's 1971 research on shame theory to Mellon's original research on library anxiety. McAfee (2018) emphasizes the role of shame in library anxiety, where students feel self-conscious about exposing their knowledge gaps, and "the shame is reflected in the belief that one has failed to meet the librarian's basic expectations of library knowledge" (p. 248). This insight is particularly relevant to research consultations, as students may feel ashamed of asking for help and hesitate to voice concerns during the appointment.

While space may be one of the first barriers to entry and triggers of library anxiety, miscommunication, or communication breakdown during an interaction with a librarian can exacerbate a student's library anxiety, fuel psychological discomfort, and affect shame. Though focused on reference interactions with international students, Lund's (2020) discussion on anxiety-uncertainty management theory is highly relevant for mitigating library anxiety in research consultations and may prove useful in developing research consultation accommodations. The anxiety-uncertainty theory suggests that a high level of uncertainty in a situation can trigger anxiety, which in turn inhibits effective communication. Lund (2020) notes that students may feel overwhelmed by the complexity of academic research, leading to communication breakdowns or a lack of communication altogether. The anxiety-uncertainty theory may be useful to apply to research consultations, especially given that a research consultation amounts to a longer and more in-depth reference interaction.

In the context of research consultations, library anxiety may manifest even more prominently due to the length and personal nature of the interaction. Students may feel additional pressure to demonstrate research competence or worry about exposing gaps in their knowledge, as highlighted by McAfee's (2018) discussion of shame and self-consciousness. The extended time frame and one-on-one format of research consultations can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy if not carefully managed. However, insights from these studies suggest that fostering a supportive, empathetic environment and employing strategies to reduce uncertainty, as described by Lund (2020), can mitigate these effects. By recognizing and addressing library anxiety, research consultations have the potential not only to improve students' research skills but also to build their confidence in engaging with library resources.

Conclusion

Our review of the literature has shown that there is a lack of research focused on providing or supporting accommodations in research consultations. Due to the lack of literature on this topic, we explored other areas of research related to assistive technology, accommodations in libraries, library spaces, and library anxiety. Our exploration showed that libraries have been taking the accessibility needs of their patrons into account in many other areas, so exploring how accommodations can be provided during research consultations is a natural progression of this trend. By considering if library services, like research consultations, can be made more accessible for users, libraries can go beyond ADA compliance to meet more user needs.

By exploring the literature related to this topic, we were able to identify areas where there is a wealth of information and areas where there is not as much of it. For example, there is a considerable amount of literature on assistive technology in libraries, discussing the ethical and legal importance of having assistive technologies readily available when users need them. As public institutions, libraries are legally obligated to provide access to materials and services for all users, and the literature documents a multitude of ways that libraries are making sure to fulfill this requirement. By comparison, there is not as much literature on how libraries are supporting users that are neurodivergent, and there are likely other user populations that need to be considered as well. Some publications discuss these topics, but their relationship with research consultations is unclear. For example, library anxiety is an established topic in library science literature, but the impact it can have on research consultations has not been widely researched or published on. Based on Walton and McMullin's (2021) article that talks about ways to make academic library spaces more welcoming for Autistic students, some of these users could experience library anxiety that prevents them from requesting a research consultation with a librarian. While Walton and McMullin's article does not explicitly mention library anxiety, it does mention how aspects of library environments can increase anxiety in Autistic students. This information could be used to begin exploring the ways that library interactions and services can unintentionally cause anxiety in users and changes that could be made to library spaces or services to reduce the amount of anxiety users experience in library spaces.

Further research needs to be conducted on how to support accommodations in research consultations. This includes methods for reducing user anxiety, tools for regulating sensory stimuli, recommendations for assistive technologies, and layout changes for research consultation rooms and other library spaces. This research will support current and future library users by taking more user needs into account. While these accommodations and changes are being researched with specific user groups in mind, the resulting changes could benefit all library users, similar to how applying Universal Design for Learning to instructional materials can benefit all students by making information and materials more accessible.

At the Kennesaw State University Libraries, we have started developing documentation and best practices for providing some accommodations during research consultations. The Kennesaw State University Libraries began offering a limited number of accommodations roughly four years ago, but up until the last year or so our patrons rarely requested any accommodation for their research consultation. In the past year, the Research Consultation Service has seen a dramatic increase in the number of consultations being scheduled where the patron has requested one or more accommodation. Upon noticing this increase, we began to develop best practices for these accommodations to standardize the processes we use and to train all the librarians administering consultations on how to provide the accommodations we offer, with the ultimate goal of enhancing the support we offer to our patrons.

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Peer-Reviewed Article

Implementation of a Low-Tech, Low-Cost Microclimate Assessment Strategy in a Small University Library: A Longitudinal Year-Long Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Academic libraries commonly employ commercial data loggers for continuous monitoring of microclimate conditions of collections. Yet, for small and medium-sized academic libraries, the proposition of sustainable microclimate monitoring and the initiation of a collection preservation program requires considerable investment of time, personnel, and funding. Under the pressure of shrinking budgets, personnel, and efforts to implement sustainable evidence-based practices, small academic libraries must make critical decisions regarding collection preservation and management. The present case examines the success of a year-long initiative implementing a low-tech, low-cost environmental assessment strategy leading to informed decision-making and justification of additional environmental monitoring. The strategy aims at finding balance between cost-effectiveness and sustainable preservation practice in a small-sized academic library.

KEYWORDS

Academic Library, Low-Cost, Microclimate Assessment, Collection Preservation Policy

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Introduction

Modern collection preservation strategies regularly employ sophisticated HVAC unit controls, interactive software, and a host of discrete real-time, continuous data loggers to assess microclimate conditions throughout select library spaces. However, absent in the literature are studies examining truly low-cost, low-tech strategies for effective baseline assessment of environmental conditions in library collections. This is especially true for the contexts of small to medium-sized university libraries and non-profit organizations preparing for collection policy review or who desire to establish sustainable environmental monitoring plans (Morris, 2009).

Library Microclimate Assessment

Having a working preservation monitoring program is essential in the modern library and should be achievable with moderate effort (Baird, 2003; Morris, 2004; Harvey & Mahard, 2020). Yet, with tight budgets, the considerable upfront investment of equipment purchase, commitment of limited employee time, and justification for extended maintenance costs associated with commercial data loggers can all be obstacles for practical implementation among small organizations tasked with significant collection preservation and management. Environmental preservation strategies which consider limitations in budgetary or asset allocation and reinforce cost-savings are of particular interest and need.

The Problem: Environmental Controls and Monitoring

In the summer of 2022, following employee reports of abnormal and unexplained fluctuations in temperature and humidity, the present study was first considered. Specifically, library administrators considered options for how they might readily validate employee reports as well as address the fundamental lack of measurable data for temperature and humidity throughout the library. At the time, no prior record of indoor environmental monitoring of the collections existed, nor was there a policy in place governing the measure of variables such as temperature and humidity to inform long-term collection preservation and decision-making.

To address the gap in data, an initial, small-scale (2-week) experimental design was employed which resulted in an extended 1-year study. The initial short-term study included the purchase of low-cost temperature and relative humidity spot-sensors, the placement of the sensors in principal areas throughout the library on two floors, and the observation of measured changes in temperature and relative humidity over a 10-day period during July 2022.

Based on initial results, notable fluctuations in environmental conditions were observed and it was determined that additional data was needed. Data would be collected on a long-term basis for 1 year to establish a more accurate and complete analysis of both the seasonal changes in temperature and relative humidity to substantiate employee reports of particularly high or low conditions seasonally. Critical to this decision, however, was the need to conduct the study affordably and without significant time investment. For two years running, the library budget was flat, without increase or indication of additional budgetary allocation despite increases in publisher subscription fees and the institutional expectation to maintain access to robust collections. All cost savings found from ending underutilized database licenses and shortening collection development budgets were deferred to sustain the remaining collection capacity. During this same period, the library also saw a moderate reduction in force, specifically retirements and lateral job shifts, requiring a temporary redistribution of workload among staff and expanded faculty teaching schedules.

The total cost to purchase the spot sensors for this study was less than $40 and the time commitment of personnel no more than 1.5 hours per week. Thus, library leadership approved a proposal for an extended longitudinal study which expanded on the original design and sought to answer the following fundamental questions:

1. Can low-cost, low-tech temperature and humidity spot-sensors provide meaningful and accurate data for initial microclimate assessment in select library spaces? If so:
    a. Does the library maintain expected levels of temperature and humidity throughout the year consistent with professional standards for sustainable preservation of print materials?
    b. Do levels of temperature and humidity fluctuate to particularly high or low levels and remain sustained over periods of time within a given year?
    c. If humidity and temperature are sustained at high or low levels over time, especially outside the expected range of conditions for patron comfort, exactly when, where, and for how long are these aberrant conditions present?
2. Do the findings justify the purchase and maintained use of moderately expensive, continuous data loggers to promote an accurate and sustained assessment of library environmental conditions?

Literature Review

Low-Cost Datalogger Utilization

Contemporary use and validation of truly “low-cost” data loggers and electronic monitoring devices to measure indoor microclimates has been driven primarily by small museums, heritage sites, cultural centers, and religious buildings with particular focus on open-source technology and do-it-yourself (DIY) data loggers (Basto et al., 2017; Maceli & Cocciolo, 2017; Mesas-Carrascosa et al., 2016; Sileo et al., 2017; Silva et al., 2020). Other studies utilize an

Internet-of-Things (IoT) approach based on a wide array of small sensors like the those used in a smart watch to continuously assess microclimate needs (Londero et. al, 2016). Such tools are commercially available and affordable but can be technically cumbersome and often require customization.

Many of these studies center on the necessity of employing affordable tools as sustainable strategies for acquiring continuous environmental data vital to informing effective preservation decision-making, particularly for regularly changing environments or in preparation for periods of disruption. For example, Mesas-Carrascosa et al. (2016) utilized open-source hardware and software tools (i.e., Arduino platform and C++ programming) to coordinate and monitor microclimate conditions of a historic cathedral in Cordoba, Spain. Similarly, Basto et al. (2017) surveyed the utility of various open-source environmental monitoring tools that could be employed to assess the microclimate health of heritage structures during periods of construction or restoration.

While this research suggests that open-access hardware and associated software are viable tools for developing effective microclimate preservation strategy, they necessarily require a commensurate level of technical understanding and large personnel effort to set up, implement, and maintain (Karami et al., 2018; Maceli & Cocciolo, 2017).

Microclimate Monitoring Guidance

Several professional organizations, such as the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC), offer insight into low-cost/no-cost improvements to microclimate conditions of libraries and archives. Prescribed environmental adaptations, however, are limited primarily to factors influencing local climate controls (leaky window seals, proximity of direct heating from vents, etc.) and do not cover low-cost assessment tools (NEDCC Staff, 1999). Of notable value are the NEDCC's basic guidelines for preservation and updated preservation leaflets concerning 1) successfully monitoring temperature and relative humidity (Willer, 2022), and 2) protecting paper and book collections (Glasser, 2020).

Likewise, the NEDCC provides an excellent review of various moderately-priced devices used in libraries and archives to monitor environmental climate conditions between library spaces. Relevant advice is given on the placement of microclimate monitoring equipment, stressing the importance "to collect at least a year's worth of monitoring data in any one location before making any substantial changes to building systems or collection locations" (Willer, 2022, p.4).

Helpful guidance can also be found with the Canadian Conservation Institute which maintains a robust series of technical bulletins including a meticulous review of methods and insightful guidelines for assessing and sustaining appropriate levels of humidity and temperature in collections (Michalski, 2000; Michalski, 2002).

Finally, the Image Permanence Institute (IPI) provides an excellent review of a wide array of environmental monitoring tools (Ford et al., 2012; Image Permanence Institute, 2024), including modern data loggers and their various functions, capacities, benefits, as well as advantages and limitations relevant to use in sustainable preservation practices and metrics (Reilly, 2003; Richardson et. al, 2023). The Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts (CCAHA) maintains a similar list of contemporary "low-cost" data loggers in a convenient comparison chart, with review of the most commonly available and implemented units ranging from as low as $70 to as high as $400+ per unit (CCAHA Staff, 2022).

Contemporary guidance from conservation organizations and modern research focuses heavily on moderate to high-cost ($150-$500/unit), continuous measure data loggers for initial assessment and associated software of more costly data dashboards for extended monitoring of environmental conditions of collections (Maceli et. al, 2019). While these tools are valuable in persistent microclimate monitoring, both the collective cost to purchase and the extension of personnel responsibilities may be difficult to justify without affordability and preliminary evidence (see Discussion, section *Getting Started*).

The following study seeks to determine whether the implementation of a truly low-cost ($2.50/unit) network of spot-monitoring devices can provide accurate data for significant (year-long) analysis of changes in temperature and relative humidity for a given collection and thus provide both the justification for purchase and an informed review of the fundamental concerns related to sustainable preservation management.

Methods and Materials

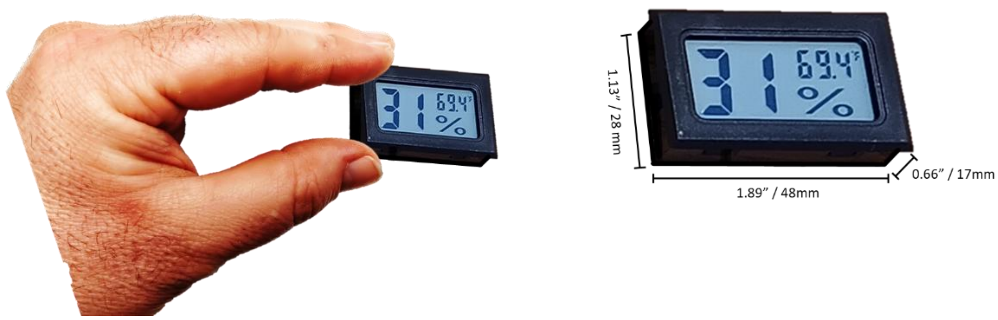
Assessment Strategy Design

Twelve miniature, low-power (i.e., watch battery-operated) digital thermometer-hygrometer sensors[1] were purchased from Tasogen Company and placed in key locations throughout the library (Figure 1). Areas of observation included the reference collection, special collections, upstairs main collection, bound periodicals, Collection Services, Media Plex, Curriculum Materials Center, archives, and downstairs main collection. Careful attention was given to the sensor's placement within each area so as to be both visible to read and placed within an appropriate proximity of collection materials (Figure 2).

[1] A marked difference in these sensors from more sophisticated sensors is the absence of baseline recalibration options. However, the simplicity of sensor design, low cost per sensor, and high capacity for reliable measurement over extended periods of time, make these sensors a valuable, reliable, and cost-saving tool especially for smaller, budget-limited institutions without the need for technical expertise.

Figure 1

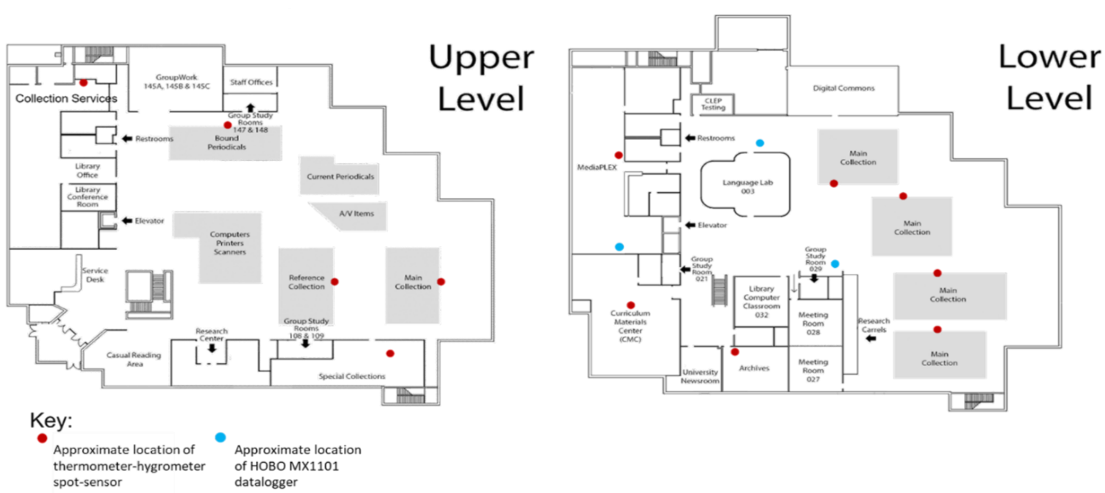
Low-cost sensor with dimensions and visual display



Moreover, sensors were situated so as not to be within immediate distance and direct influence of an active HVAC outlet or adjacent windows from which irradiance (i.e., the flux of ambient convective heat and light) might influence results (Ford et al., 2012; Linden et. al, 2012; Willer, 2022). Temperatures were measured in degrees Fahrenheit (°F) to the tenth of one degree, and humidity as the percent relative humidity (RH%). Relative humidity is a whole number measure of the ratio of approximately how much water vapor (XX%) is in a sample water-air mixture of a given area compared to the total maximum amount possible (100%) for a given temperature and pressure.

Figure 2

Map of the Library[2] with Approximate Placement of Sensors



[2] Each floor covers approximately 33,000 square feet of space consisting primarily of open collections, special collections, archives, offices, study rooms, and computer labs.

Temperature and humidity levels were observed and measured twice a day, once in the morning and once in the afternoon over a 10-day period at the start of each month (i.e., over two successive 5-day work weeks). Observations were taken by one individual, over a short 15-minute period using a simple tablet and spreadsheet data template to record temperature, relative humidity, and time of day corresponding to each sensor location. When necessary, accommodation was made for holidays.

Additional measurements were taken of outdoor temperature and humidity as conditional points of reference to be included in final analysis for potential influence on indoor temperature and relative humidity and overall HVAC system performance. Outdoor temperature and humidity levels were taken from a Meteorological Aerodrome Report (METAR) weather station that was readily available online and managed by the local county airport near the university campus.

Finally, because HVAC system work began in the middle of the study period, three highly accurate HOBO MX1101 temperature and humidity monitors were placed within the library by the contracting company to help maintain environmental conditions during renovation. Data from these monitors over a six-month period served as an excellent concurrent dataset of evidence from which to assess the accuracy of the less sophisticated spot-sensors.

As a follow up to the year-long study, an additional reliability test was conducted to observe the endurance of spot-sensor measurability and account for potential accuracy drift (Figure 3). At the end of the study period, all 12 spot-sensors and a HOBO MX1101 data logger were relocated to the same temperature-controlled office as the first test and allowed to acclimatize over a weekend period accounting for three nights and two days.

Figure 3

Results of Spot-sensor and Datalogger Acclimatization, Reliability, and Accuracy Drift

Data Reliability and Spot-sensor Performance

The Tasogen Mini Digital Thermometer-Hygrometer (spot-sensor)[3] claims to measure environmental conditions of temperature and relative humidity every 10 seconds, with a measurable temperature range of -58°F to 158°F and humidity of 10%-90% RH, and further claims of accuracy of ±2°F and ±5% RH. These sensors have notable limitations that are not otherwise present in more sophisticated and expensive dataloggers. First, the sensors run on smaller voltage batteries with expected battery life to extend no more than 1.5 years, if left undisturbed. Notably, only one spot-sensor had its batteries replaced out of the 12 sensors employed during the entire study period. Moreover, these sensors are calibrated once at the point of manufacture and have no mechanism to (re)calibrate the internal electronic components measuring temperature and relative humidity.

To account for the potential variation in temperature and relative humidity of spot-sensor measurements, three reliability tests were conducted. First, at the start of the study the twelve spot-sensors were placed together and allowed to acclimatize to the same temperature-controlled office over a weekend period accounting for three nights and two days. At the end of the weekend period, observation of each sensor's measurable readings was compared. Variability in temperature between the sensors accounted for a difference of 0.0-0.4°F, and a difference in relative humidity of 0-2% RH. Overall, variability for both temperature and relative humidity were within the expected level of acceptable reliability and accuracy: ± 2°F and ± 3% RH respectively for digital thermometer-hygrometers (Brown, 1994; Harvey & Mahard, 2020).

Given that the usual external mechanisms for calibration and maintenance were absent from the spot-sensors employed in this study, a second test was conducted which incorporated a more sophisticated electronic thermometer-hygrometer for concurrent temperature and humidity measurements as a control. A HOBO MX1101 Temperature-Relative Humidity Data Logger[4], borrowed from the university science and math department, was co-located with the twelve spot-sensors under the same conditions as the first test.

Variability in temperature accounted for 0.0-0.5°F, and humidity a difference of 0.0-3.5% RH between all sensors. Again, the resulting variability was within the expected level of reliability and accuracy for an electronic thermometer-hygrometer. The HOBO data logger claims an accuracy of ±2% RH within a range of 20-80% RH and an accuracy of ±4.5-6% RH levels outside this range. For accuracy of temperature readings, the datalogger claims ±0.38°F between 32°F and 122°F.

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[3] Details regarding spot-sensor specifications are available at the following link: https://www.amazon.com/TASOGEN-Thermometer-Hygrometer-Temperature-Fahrenheit/dp/B08P3QJJZL

[4] Details regarding the HOBO MX1101 specifications are available at the following link: https://www.onsetcomp.com/products/data-loggers/mx1101#specifications

Results

Overall Temperature and Humidity Levels

A total of 5,280 observations were taken for measures of temperature and relative humidity from 12 spot-sensors over a period of one year (Jan 1 -Dec 31, 2023)[5]. These observations constitute the basis of the overall microclimate analysis, comprising all collections and various storage spaces within the upper and lower levels of the library. A summary of the monthly average microclimate results is listed below (Table 1), and a complete table of all observations is available on request.

The highest recorded temperature (80.0°F) occurred twice on the same day in April and once in June, both within locations in the Upstairs Main Collection and Bound Periodical sections during a down period of scheduled HVAC maintenance. The lowest recorded temperatures (61-63°F) occurred over a series of two days in October within the library Archives, located in the basement of the library. The highest recorded measure of humidity (60% RH) occurred multiple times in June during renovations, and four times over two-days in September during a period of heavy, late summer rain showers. The lowest recorded levels of relative humidity (21-23%) occurred downstairs in the Curriculum Materials Center in mid-December following an extended 6-week period of low outdoor humidity.

Expected and Variable Levels by Season and Location

Temperature

Library temperatures in the first six months of the year varied across all spaces. However, the latter six months of the study indicated that overall temperatures throughout the library and its individual spaces were consistent and stable, both within the recommended and tolerable ranges expected of an active academic library. While average library temperatures hovered slightly above professional recommendations, these temperatures were well within the acceptable limits for extending the preservation life of library materials and sufficiently met the functional comfort of patrons using these spaces. There were no major concerns regarding the temperature regime employed in the library.

[5] Observations for the month of June were partially disrupted, impacting the results of the study during this period. Researchers had to temporarily relocate multiple data loggers during shifts in several upper floor collections during building renovations. Moreover, HVAC climate controls of the library were disabled over intermittent periods of the month as Air Handling Unit equipment was removed and replaced, potentially skewing results from accurately measuring otherwise “normal” library climate conditions.

Table 1

Table of Monthly Average Microclimate Results by Location

Observations	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Average Annual Temp/Humidity (**Reference Collection**)	73.4						38.4%					
Monthly Average Temperature (°F)	75.3	75.6	75.8	75.4	74.0	76.5	69.2	70.6	71.2	72.8	72.2	72.6
Monthly Average Humidity (%RH)	30.8%	29.9%	29.8%	32.3%	36.0%	52.5%	51.3%	49.8%	47.2%	36.8%	33.7%	30.9%
Average Annual Temp/Humidity (**Special Collection**)	70.4						40.7%					
Monthly Average Temperature	67.7	70.0	72.3	72.4	71.5	74.7	68.5	68.9	68.8	69.1	70.2	70.5
Monthly Average Humidity	35.2%	32.5%	30.5%	33.5%	37.0%	52.5%	54.3%	53.5%	50.9%	41.4%	35.3%	31.4%
Average Annual Temp/Humidity (**Upstairs Main Collection**)	73.3						38.6%					
Monthly Average Temperature	74.4	74.7	74.9	75.4	73.1	76.1	71.5	71.7	71.5	72.3	71.6	71.8
Monthly Average Humidity	31.6%	30.5%	30.4%	32.2%	35.7%	53.8%	49.0%	48.7%	47.0%	38.2%	34.7%	31.3%
Average Annual Temp/Humidity (**Bound Periodicals**)	71.0						39.9%					
Monthly Average Temperature	73.0	73.2	73.6	74.3	72.2	76.0	68.8	68.5	68.1	68.7	68.1	67.9
Monthly Average Humidity	32.2%	31.3%	31.5%	33.0%	36.7%	54.0%	51.9%	53.8%	50.3%	38.4%	35.1%	31.0%
Average Annual Temp/Humidity (**Collection Services**)	72.9						40.5%					
Monthly Average Temperature	71.3	74.5	73.6	73.5	71.6	75.9	74.2	72.5	71.3	71.9	72.5	72.1
Monthly Average Humidity	34.7%	31.4%	31.6%	35.5%	39.9%	53.6%	49.6%	51.1%	50.7%	40.3%	35.5%	31.9%
Average Annual Temp/Humidity (**Media Plex**)	71.9						38.5%					
Monthly Average Temperature	69.6	70.4	71.0	72.0	71.6	75.7	72.3	73.0	71.8	73.0	71.3	71.6
Monthly Average Humidity	34.6%	32.9%	32.9%	36.4%	38.9%	47.9%	40.6%	46.0%	46.8%	38.1%	35.0%	32.2%
Average Annual Temp/Humidity (**Curriculum Materials Center**)	72.3						38.3%					
Monthly Average Temperature	69.8	70.4	71.1	72.1	71.9	76.1	72.8	73.2	72.7	73.6	72.5	71.3
Monthly Average Humidity	35.2%	33.0%	32.6%	36.8%	38.7%	48.3%	39.6%	45.6%	47.0%	39.3%	35.8%	27.6%
Average Annual Temp/Humidity (**Archives**)	67.2						42.8%					
Monthly Average Temperature	65.0	65.0	65.5	66.9	67.1	71.9	70.3	70.0	67.2	66.0	65.1	66.1
Monthly Average Humidity	38.8%	37.0%	35.6%	39.4%	42.8%	51.4%	45.8%	49.7%	53.6%	44.7%	39.9%	34.9%
Average Annual Temp/Humidity (**Downstairs Main Collection**)	71.5						40.4%					
Monthly Average Temperature	69.9	70.1	71.2	71.8	71.3	75.7	72.3	72.8	70.0	71.9	69.7	71.3
Monthly Average Humidity	35.6%	34.0%	32.7%	36.3%	39.9%	50.7%	43.2%	49.2%	52.8%	40.6%	37.9%	32.4%

Taken as a whole, the average annual temperature for the library was reasonably stable, with upstairs annual temperatures (71.9°F) marginally warmer than downstairs temperatures (70.7°F). These temperatures were consistent with expectations of professional guidelines ranging from 68-72°F (±2°F). Seasonally, temperature upstairs demonstrated a distinct shift between the first and second half of the study period. From Jan-May, seasonal average temperatures were consistently ~73°F (Special Collections in winter being the exception) with wider fluctuations as high as 75.6°F, but from Jul-Dec, overall seasonal temperatures dipped by nearly 3°F and remained consistent around 70°F (±2°F). This marked shift from a higher to more moderate temperature threshold was most notable upstairs for the reference and main Collections.

Seasonal variations of downstairs temperature fluctuations were more modest. Over the first six months of the year (winter and spring), the downstairs was marked by consistent, though moderately elevated, fluctuations in temperature from 70-73°F. However, this period was followed by a noticeable inconsistency in temperature fluctuation month to month, oscillating from low (69.0°F) to high (73.0°F) from summer through fall to the end of the year.

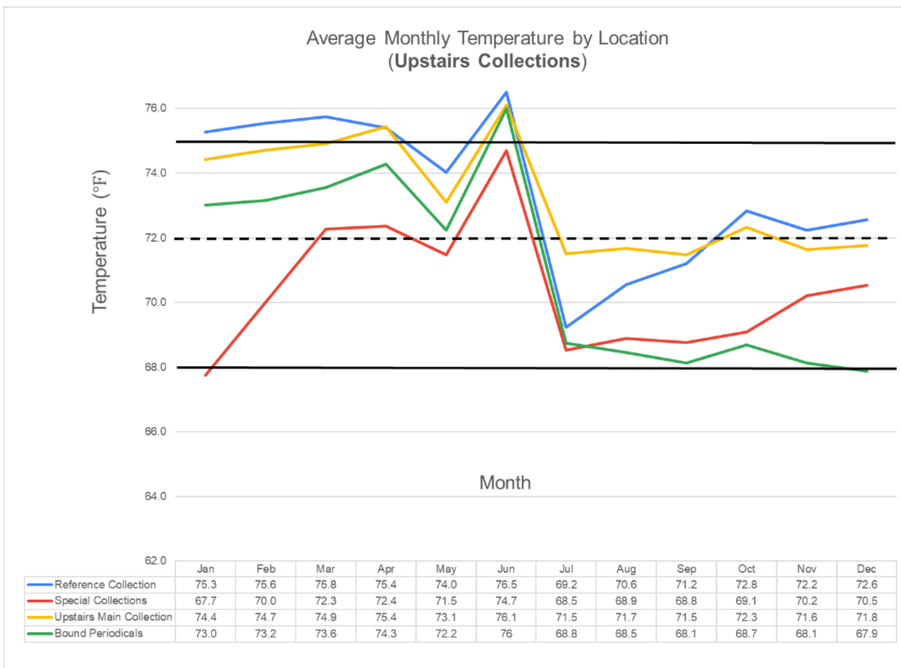
Of the 12 individual locations assessed by the spot sensors of the study, notable variations in temperature by location were demonstrated. The upstairs reference collection, main collection, and bound periodicals demonstrated the three highest sustained temperature fluctuations (73.0°F -75.6°F) early in the year (Jan-May), each followed by sharp declines in

July (68.8°F-71.5°F) until slowly moderating to a narrow climate fluctuation range late in Nov-Dec (70.2°F-72.6°F) (Figures 4 & 5).

The downstairs collections all followed congruent monthly average temperature fluctuation trajectories with sustained rising temperatures through the year from an average low 69.6°F (Jan-Feb) and 73.0°F (May-Jun), to 73.3°F (Sep-Oct), and finally moderating to 71.3°F late in the year. The downstairs main collection maintained consistent and narrow monthly average temperature fluctuations between the four sensors and mirrored annual fluctuations elsewhere in downstairs spaces.

Figure 4

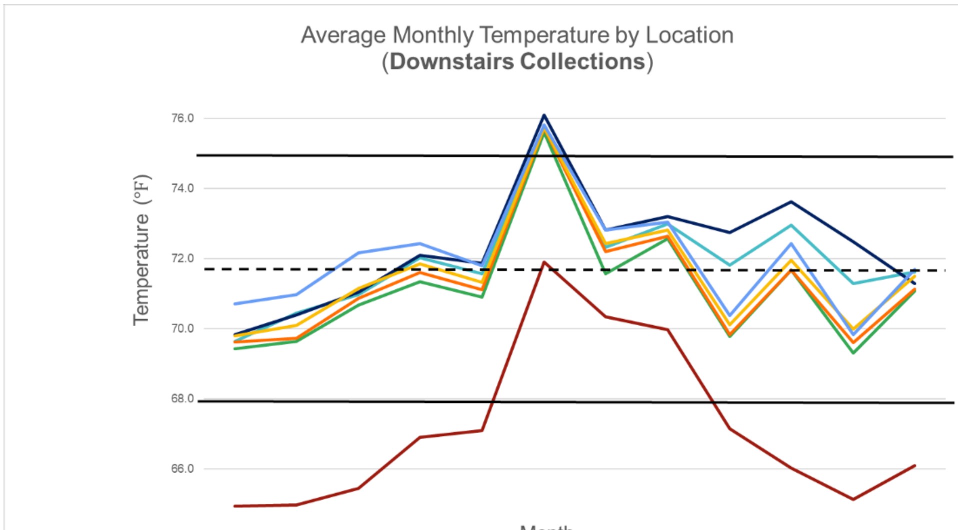
Average Monthly Temperatures for Upstairs Collections (Jan-Dec 2023)[6]



[6] For all graphs, the solid black lines (—) represent the upper and lower limits of professional recommendations for temperature and relative humidity, while the dashed line (----) represents the overall annual average.

Figure 5

Average Monthly Temperatures for Downstairs Collections (Jan-Dec 2023)



	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Media Plex	69.6	70.4	71.0	72.0	71.6	75.7	72.3	73.0	71.8	73.0	71.3	71.6
Curriculum Materials Center	69.8	70.4	71.1	72.1	71.9	76.1	72.8	73.2	72.7	73.6	72.5	71.3
Archives	65.0	65.0	65.5	66.9	67.1	71.9	70.3	70.0	67.2	66.0	65.1	66.1
Downstairs Stack 12	69.4	69.6	70.7	71.3	70.9	75.6	71.6	72.6	69.8	71.7	69.3	71.1
Downstairs Stack 25	69.6	69.7	70.9	71.6	71.1	75.73	72.2	72.6	69.8	71.7	69.6	71.1
Downstairs Stack 33	69.8	70.1	71.2	71.9	71.3	75.75	72.4	72.8	70.1	72.0	70.0	71.5
Downstairs Stack 44	70.7	71.0	72.2	72.4	71.8	75.81	72.8	73.0	70.4	72.4	69.8	71.7

Humidity

Library humidity observed over the entire course of study indicated persistently low relative humidity levels throughout the library and its individual spaces, but not too low. Given the higher range of temperature maintained in the library (70-72°F), the risk for biological growth is typically greater, unless the relative humidity in that given space is also low. Not only did the library maintain a lower average relative humidity, which minimized the risk of mold growth, but the average relative humidity was well within the recommended limits for print materials even during seasonal periods of persistently high or low relative humidity (i.e., summer or winter).

The average annual relative humidity for the library (38.8%RH) was at the low end of the range of industry recommendations (30-60%RH). Average annual relative humidity upstairs (38.4%) was marginally lower than average annual relative humidity downstairs (39.3%). Monthly average relative humidity upstairs demonstrated a broader range of fluctuation from as low as 30.6% RH to as high as 52.6%RH (dif: ±22.0%RH). The monthly average relative humidity downstairs demonstrated a marginally narrower range in fluctuation than upstairs from as low as 32.8%RH to as high as 51.3%RH (dif: ±18.5%RH).

The most notable seasonal variation in humidity was the distinct difference in the severity of fluctuation between upstairs and downstairs from late Spring to Early Summer. The upstairs experienced an early, sharp increase in average monthly humidity in May and sustained elevated levels of humidity through the end of Sep during the summer seasonal inversion. Comparatively, the downstairs experienced slow, gradual increases in average monthly humidity, demonstrating far less seasonal influence on fluctuation in relative humidity with short-lived fluctuations.

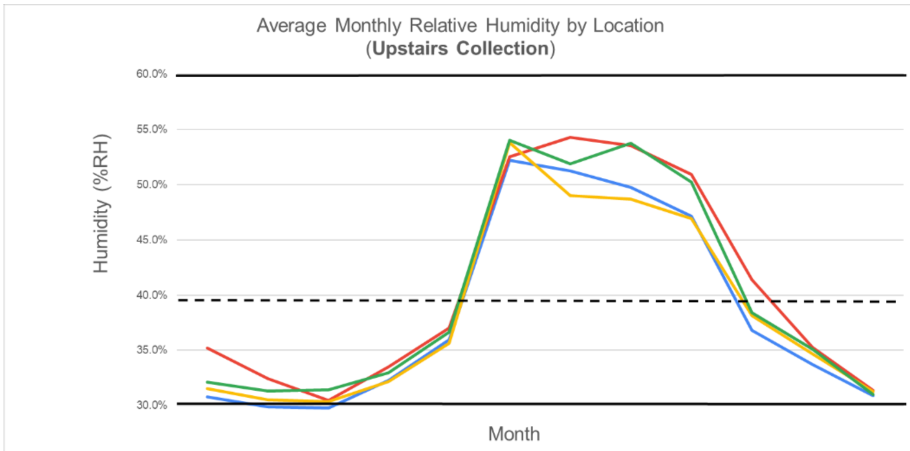
Likewise, just as the upstairs collections started showing signs of decline in late summer humidity, the downstairs had just reached its peak, followed quickly by rapid decline in humidity the following month. Notably, the highest humidity levels (60%RH) occurred at the very end of the more humid summer season yet were 12% lower than the highest recorded measure (72%RH) from the July 2022 pretest. Likewise, the highest recorded levels for humidity (58%RH) in July 2023 were 14% lower than those recorded (72%RH) in the prior July 2022.

Comparatively, nearly all 12 sensors mirrored identical average monthly temperature fluctuation trajectories with expected lower levels of humidity in winter months and higher levels in summer months (Figures 6 and 7). The upstairs spaces demonstrated the lowest average monthly humidity early in the year with levels ranging as low as 29.8%RH and as high as 33.5%RH from Jan-Apr. These same locations experienced elevated levels of humidity starting in May (~37-38%RH), peaking in Jul-Sep (47-54%) and returning to sub-40%RH by Oct, sustaining low humidity through the end of the year with a steady decline from 38%RH to 30.0%RH.

The downstairs collections followed congruent monthly humidity fluctuation trajectories, maintaining lower humidity levels than all other downstairs locations with 32-35%RH early and late in the year and highest humidity levels never reaching above 47%RH. In contrast, the archives demonstrated the highest levels of humidity with 36-40%RH early and late in the year, and highest levels reaching 53.6% in the middle of the year.

Figure 6

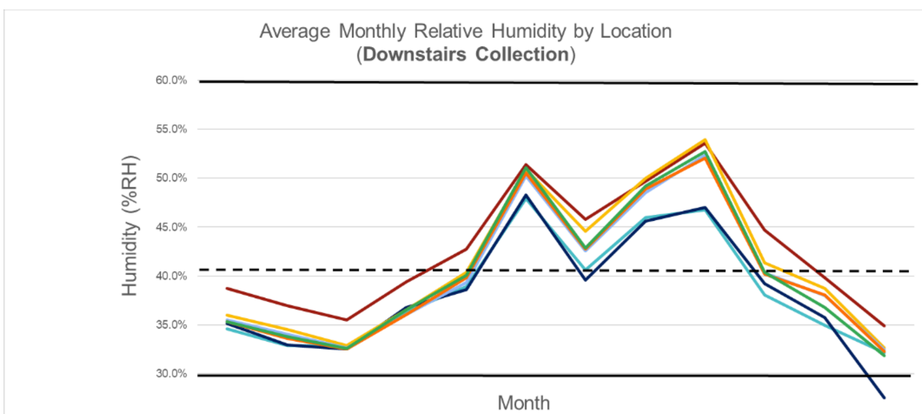
Average Monthly Relative Humidity for Upstairs Collections (Jan-Dec 2023)



	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Reference Collection	30.8%	29.9%	29.8%	32.3%	36.0%	52.2%	51.3%	49.8%	47.2%	36.8%	33.7%	30.9%
Special Collection	35.2%	32.5%	30.5%	33.5%	37.0%	52.5%	54.3%	53.5%	50.9%	41.4%	35.3%	31.4%
Upstairs Main Collection	31.6%	30.5%	30.4%	32.2%	35.7%	53.8%	49.0%	48.7%	47.0%	38.2%	34.7%	31.3%
Bound Periodicals	32.2%	31.3%	31.5%	33.0%	36.7%	54.0%	51.9%	53.8%	50.3%	38.4%	35.1%	31.0%

Figure 7

Average Monthly Relative Humidity for Downstairs Collections (Jan-Dec 2023)



	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Media Plex	34.6%	32.9%	32.9%	36.4%	38.9%	47.9%	40.6%	46.0%	46.8%	38.1%	35.0%	32.2%
Curriculum Materials Center	35.2%	33.0%	32.6%	36.8%	38.7%	48.3%	39.6%	45.6%	47.0%	39.3%	35.8%	27.6%
Archives	38.8%	37.0%	35.6%	39.4%	42.8%	51.4%	45.8%	49.7%	53.6%	44.7%	39.9%	34.9%
Downstairs Stack 12	36.0%	34.6%	32.9%	36.6%	40.4%	50.9%	44.6%	50.0%	53.9%	41.4%	38.8%	32.7%
Downstairs Stack 25	35.5%	34.1%	32.7%	36.1%	39.4%	50.3%	42.6%	48.5%	52.4%	40.4%	38.0%	32.5%
Downstairs Stack 33	35.4%	33.7%	32.6%	36.1%	39.9%	50.5%	42.8%	48.9%	52.1%	40.2%	38.1%	32.3%
Downstairs Stack 44	35.4%	33.9%	32.6%	36.6%	40.1%	51.1%	42.9%	49.2%	52.7%	40.4%	36.8%	31.9%

Limitations

Study Limitations and Reliability of Results

When interpreting the results of the present study, there are clear limitations that should be considered. Most importantly, the study only captured visual observation from spot-sensors during the busiest times of library operation, taken twice a day over a 10-day period accounting for approximately one-third of the total days of any given month. An expanded faculty teaching load and the addition of redistributed responsibilities limited the researcher's overall availability to take more observations than ideally desired. In hindsight, this was a missed opportunity to involve student workers, especially during off hours throughout the week and weekends. Moreover, the study precludes variations in temperature and relative humidity throughout most of the observable moments of any single day. Finally, the study relied on digital tools which were absent the capacity for recalibration. These tools were used only to capture spot-observations before, during, and after a period of significant disruption in normal HVAC system function. Yet, despite these limitations, strong arguments exist for interpreting the acquired results as reliable and valid for broad interpretation and analysis:

1) The *reliability tests* examining accuracy between the simple spot-sensors and more sophisticated counterparts (HOBO MX1101) demonstrated reliable measures of consistency, both in terms of the overall measures recorded, and in demonstration of low accuracy-drift between each spot-sensor at the start and end of the study period.
2) The *physical data* gathered over time from the spot-sensors on the lower floor, over a specific extended period (July-Dec 2022), demonstrated consistent, side-by-side measures of temperature and humidity compared with the microclimate measures taken from more sophisticated tools.

When compared against three HOBO MX 1101 data loggers placed in three adjacent downstairs spaces during HVAC system replacement from July -Dec 2023 (Figures 8 & 9), the spot-sensor data followed near identical delineated fluctuations in temperature and relative humidity as the data recorded by the HOBO data loggers over the same time period.

Figure 8

Comparison of Temperature between Three HOBO Data Loggers and Adjacent Spot-sensors

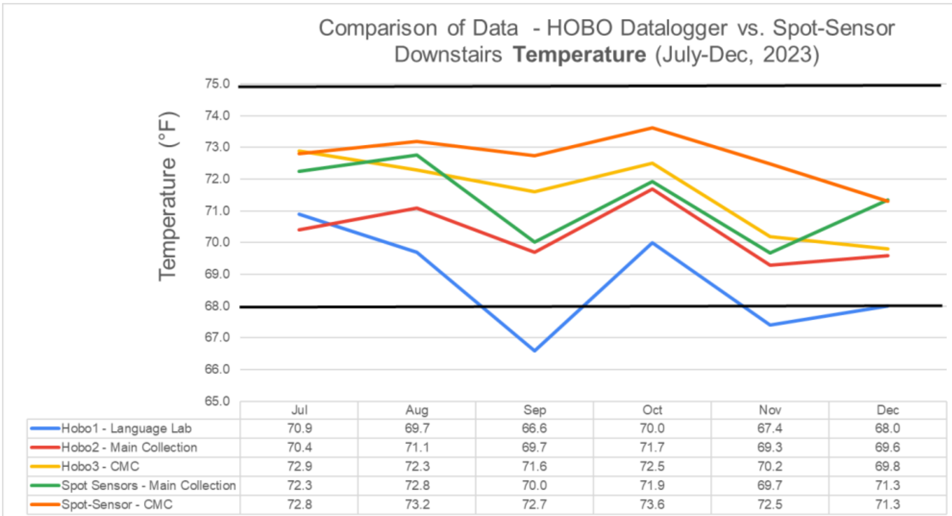
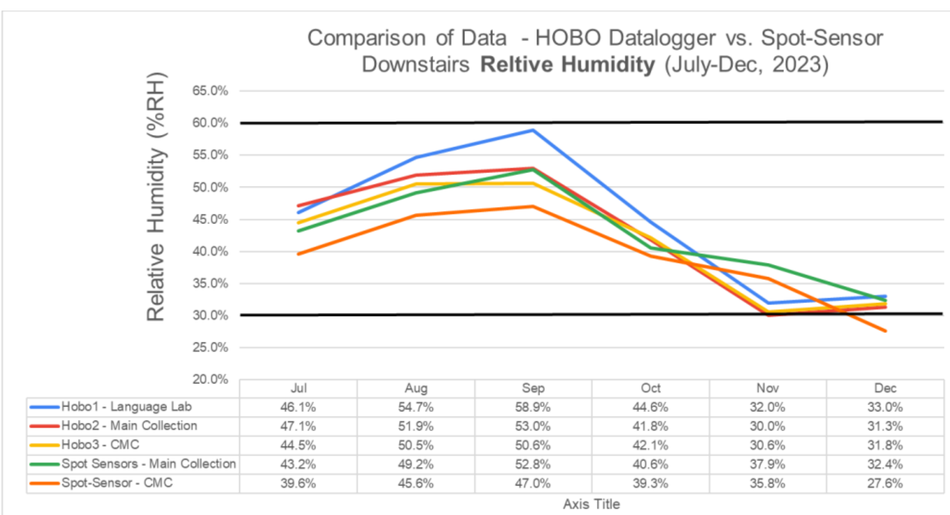


Figure 9

Comparison of Relative Humidity Between Three HOBO Data Loggers and Adjacent Spot-sensors



In each instance, average fluctuations for both temperature and relative humidity as measured by the rudimentary spot-sensors, directly mirrored the more sophisticated and detailed continuous measures taken by HOBO hygrometers. The results, while limited in their interpretive scope, are validated by the tangible consistency of measures taken against more reliable thermometer- hygrometers and the notable accuracy of those measures between spot-sensors over time.

Between the 12 spot-sensors, variability in measures of relative humidity accounted for 0-3%RH difference. For temperature, variability between 11 out of 12 sensors accounted for 0.0-1.3°F. Only one sensor had a notable drift in accuracy in temperature with a 3.2°F difference from the next lowest temperature recorded in the twelve sensors. The same sensor with temperature drift also recorded the lowest %RH of all the 12 sensors tested. In comparison to the HOBO data logger, 11 of the 12 spots sensors demonstrated 0.0-1.3°F difference, and the final spot-sensor with notable accuracy drift, a difference of 3.2°F. In terms of relative humidity, all 12 sensors accounted for wider variability from the HOBO data logger with a difference of 5.0-7.0 %RH, but still within acceptable tolerance for relative humidity measures. Despite accuracy drift in one sensor for temperature and humidity, all measures were included in the final analysis as they were still within expected margins of error and the safe ranges for preservation of collection materials.

Each spot-sensor demonstrated unexpected endurance as a robust tool for repetitive measure and ultimately provided invaluable assessment data from which to draw meaningful conclusions and begin practical conversations for preservation management. Data collected from these sensors served as a reliable baseline of evidence illustrating broad-level environmental conditions of the library, as well as justification for the purchase of more sophisticated data loggers in support of the integration of a sustainable environmental monitoring program.

Discussion

Sustainable Preservation

Equipped with evidence from initial spot-sensor data, alongside the finer observations from three HOBO data loggers, an extended seasonal picture of library environmental conditions emerged. A spot-sensor monitoring strategy provided the wide-lens view of library microclimate conditions, accurately capturing marked differences across library spaces both seasonally and spatially. Most notably, the strategy illustrated the disparate climate conditions for temperature and humidity in the first half of the year, which underwent a clear shift toward stability and near uniform conditions in the second half of the year following the installation and corrective action of the new HVAC system at environmental conditioning.

Likewise, this initial strategy reinforced and supported the benefits of investing in the fine-lens view that continuous data logger monitoring provides (Mecklenburg, 2007; Linden et. al, 2012). While a spot-sensor monitoring strategy alone is insufficient to carry out the extended, detailed measures required to sustainably assess individual spaces long-term, it does serve as a meaningful, low-cost entry to initial library climate analysis. The strategy provides reliable baseline evidence to make corrective adjustments to library environmental conditions and provides supportive evidence for allocation of funds in purchase of more sophisticated equipment.

Ultimately, implementing a spot-monitoring strategy is a viable and affordable approach to enable the process of sustainable preservation management. It is both considerate of the needs of the individual library environment and commensurate with the library's means to even begin such work.

> The ideal environment is no longer expressed in terms of absolute temperature, relative humidity, light, and air-quality levels. Instead, the aim [of environmental monitoring] is to provide an environment that is achievable in relation to a building’s structure, the local climate, and available resources. - Harvey & Mahard, 2020, p. 102

The groundwork of evidence of this study served to inform administrative decision-making, policy development, and future strategic planning for spaces, collections, and patron interaction. For the library leadership, the entire process demonstrated the value of evidence-based decision making, while fostering opportunities for collective staff engagement in improving library spaces and services. Both administrators and staff are empowered with reliable data to interpret the conditional needs of the library and to imagine possible actions for change in their areas of oversight.

Moreover, the products from this project informed healthy dialogue between library leadership and campus building managers in support of long-term maintenance of library spaces. Monthly reports were so well received that they served as a catalyst for investment in additional environmental assessments including a recent, extended acoustic assessment of noise level differences among designated zones ranging from the conversational space to the silent.

Getting Started

When starting the monitoring process, particular attention should be given to the development of a simple environmental monitoring program with primary areas of effort focused on: 1) establishing reasonable goals for environmental conditions, 2) identifying special problem areas, and 3) setting priorities within collection areas (Morris, 2004, pg. 31). Modern commercial data loggers simplify this process significantly (Table 2).

Advancements in device interoperability have streamlined interactions between open access software applications and common hardware tools such as mobile devices and tablets to support the high functional utility of modern data loggers. Many data loggers no longer require plug-in connections for export of collected data points, but rather just close-proximity of port device for blue-tooth connection and Wi-Fi enabled download of multiple loggers simultaneously.

Selecting the right tool for a microclimate assessment begins with well-defined preservation needs and further depends on the scale of the areas requiring evaluation. For small libraries with small-moderate collections, starting with low-cost spot devices ($2-30) can provide meaningful baseline measurements, especially under tight budgetary constraints, with only moderate personnel time commitment. The greatest advantage such devices provide is an uncomplicated entry into preservation management with a reliable data foundation for identifying areas of improvement and refining target climate goals.

While affordable and scalable, however, low-cost devices are not sustainable for long-term preservation management. Thus, purchasing even a small number of mid-cost continuous data loggers is essential. Devices such as the HOBO Onset® series, with moderate upfront cost and adaptable placement range, provide long-term (6-12 month) continuous data monitoring options, without excessive expense and significant personnel training or time commitment. A continuous data monitoring device delivers real-time measures of climate conditions and built-in alerts necessary for evidence-based preservation management decisions.

Table 2

Table Comparing Devices Used to Monitor Microclimate Preservation Conditions

	Cost	**Function**	**Device**	**Requirements**	**Advantages**	**Disadvantages**
Low Cost	$2-3	**Spot Sensor** (Single Point Observation, Single Location)	Tasogen Spot Sensor	Direct observation only, Manual transcription of observations, battery operated, manual adjustments and replacement **Moderate Personnel Commitment**: (5-10hr/month)	Low to moderate upfront cost depending on device brand and enabled options, low area footprint, easy placement, digital high-vis readout, durable lifecycle (1-5years), low accuracy drift,	Limited recalibration options, delayed measurements between observations, limited battery life, & moderately time intensive
	$15-30		ThermoPro, Elitech, Taylor, AcuRite, Hornady, Gjx			
Mid Cost	$50-150		Govee, Switchbot, ThermoPro, SmartPro, SensorPush, INKBIRD	Direct observation, battery operated, limited software application for digital readout and review **Moderate Personnel Commitment**: (5-10hr/month)	Convenient high-vis spot observations, direct or mobile ready views, durable lifecycle (5-8 years), moderate battery life, low accuracy drift, some data capture options available	Moderate to high upfront cost, limited options for recalibration, and minimal analytics
	$150-300	**Continuous** (Multi-Point Observation, Multiple Locations)	HOBO Onset, Kestrel, Conserv, Testo, SensoScientific	Software application for digital readout & download of data, battery or direct outlet enabled, cloud data storage, limited individual training for setup and maintenance, regular data collection analysis (monthly or quarterly) **Low to Moderate Personnel Commitment**: (3-10hr/month)	Wireless sensing, continuous real-time data capture, high-vis digital readout, multi-file output formats, mobile friendly, application enabled network view of sensors and multi-device download, real-time alerts for pre-determined ranges, easy recalibration and adjustable environmental measurement settings, active monitor of device health, automatic updates of device software, strong analytics, and available customer service and training support *Provides industry standard preservation metrics which directly support data interpretation, decision-making, and sustainability practices for long-term conservation of collections	Moderate to very high upfront cost dependent upon institutional size and scope of monitoring needs, significant data storage and setup requirements, moderate to high technical training, time intensive, long-term staff commitments
High Cost	$$$ Per Device **or** Subscription ($1,500+/yr)	**Enterprise** (Multi-Point Observation, Whole System Integration)	Conserv, SenSource, Hanwell ($200+/device or custom pricing based on scope of monitoring needs) Free trial options available	Software application for digital readout & download of data, significant individual training for setup and maintenance dependent on scope and need, significant coordination with institution and facilities managers **Moderate to High Personnel Commitment**: (10-20hr/month), greater responsibility may be required depending on scope of system employed		
			eClimateNotebook PEM2 (IPI)* Based on Institution Size ($120-$900/yr) Free trial option available			

For libraries with larger collections or multiple remote locations under limited budget conditions, mid-cost options are again ideal, but higher cost options with subscriptions or institution size-based fees which offer free trials should be explored. Such options may be optimized for budget limitations and scale to institutional climate assessment need. They also provide substantial advantages such as personalized customer service, extensive equipment training, data analytics, and tailored preservation insights. For example, the eClimateNotebook® system developed by the Image Preservation Institute boasts industry tested environmental management tools and preservation metrics which accurately assess collection longevity and real-time risk. However, until sustainable fiscal and personnel allocations are established, high-cost options are simply untenable for most small-midsized libraries long-term.

Accompanying the environmental monitoring program should be an administrative policy which outlines program outcomes and expectations (Morris, 2007; Morris, 2009). The policy should express:

1. Parameters for the ideal environment:
    a. These are unique to each library and its preservation needs, such as
    b. The seasonally adjusted set range for temperature and relative humidity, and
    c. The expected hygrothermal (heat & moisture) differences of particular spaces: upstairs vs. downstairs, stored vs. open-access collections, etc.
2. Personnel responsibilities:
    a. These are the basic responsibilities for carrying out the program, such as
    b. Who is tasked with data acquisition, and how often dataloggers should take measures, and
    c. How frequently data loggers are assessed for battery life, and other ongoing maintenance, etc.
3. Products generated and Support Tools required:
    a. These are the tangible outputs or physical assets of the program which help communicate the results used in interpretation and decision-making, such as
    b. The quarterly reports and data templates for quick graphic profiles, or
    c. The hardware used for data porting and analysis.

Important Considerations for Library Managers

The study's initial effort at environmental data collection of managed spaces was well received among the smaller body of staff and spurred great interest in discussing the results and outcomes during the reporting process. Thus, any involvement of library employees in the early observation process is an opportunity that should not be wasted. Truly, a good environmental monitoring program should involve the many, for the change in those conditions affects the many. With appropriate vested interest between concerned parties, comes greater likelihood of quickly identifying areas of concern, and meaningfully addressing lingering issues of overall climate conditions (Morris, 2009).

See this moment as an opportunity to build comradery or library teamwork in an often isolated and siloed profession. Delegate a working group of individuals to establish and manage a timeline of study objectives, and to collaborate around data acquisition for shared, vested interest in the results. Uploading data to predetermined cloud folders is a task well-suited for student workers. The requisite time spent on such tasks accounts for no more than 1-2 hours in any given week, perhaps even less, depending on the expected frequency of data collection.

Likewise, the creation of data templates simplifies the interpretation of results and provides ready-to-access graphic illustrations to share internally among library staff and partners, or externally for administrative purposes, as necessary. In terms of minimizing the up-front investment required for more sophisticated data logger purchase, several grant opportunities exist, such as from the National Archives, the Institute of Museums and Library Services, and various national endowments, to fund the purchase of collection assessment tools for preservation programs. A microclimate study is an excellent opportunity to identify partners for synergistic collaboration across campus or among library-adjacent organizations. Consider the following time and cost-saving opportunities:

1. Partner with a university department or school (engineering, geosciences, etc.) to design and implement a similar microclimate study, or to simply borrow applicable equipment.
2. Offer the opportunity of a microclimate study as a student research/design project for a student in engineering, geosciences, etc.
3. Partner with a local engineering firm, museum, or community conservation group, such as a historical society to conduct microclimate research.
4. Identify funding opportunities such as:
    a. Grants from local, state, and national foundations to cover costs for tools, equipment, and internships
    b. Scholarships which cover fees to participate and present findings in professional conferences.

As early monitoring initiatives find success, more attention could be given to the broader hygrothermal dynamics of the library. This entails a holistic assessment of the entire library envelope, the boundary between indoor and outdoor spaces governing the direct exchange of environmental conditions and dynamic shifts in air pressure at doorways (Rose, 1994; Steeman et. al, 2010) or movements of patrons. Focus should be on spaces which receive a higher volume of active foot traffic such as doorways leading outside or to adjoining facilities where dynamic movement and exchange of air mass is common.

These initiatives alert collection managers to moments when climate conditions shift abruptly and endure outside of expected performance levels. Extended, continuous monitoring of environmental conditions provides real-time knowledge of when systems are operating incorrectly and provides data-driven conversation supporting relationships with facility managers and engineers. Where seasonal or spatial differences in temperature and relative humidity exist, even minor adjustments can significantly correct environmental conditions to desired expectations proportional to changes in building design, local climate, and collection access needs.

Conclusion

With moderate effort and capital, a well-reasoned spot-measure assessment strategy is an invaluable solution for initial analysis of library environmental conditions. The data collected not only establishes a reliable baseline for broad interpretation of present environmental conditions but also forms the necessary groundwork for more complex monitoring of a sustainable, long-term assessment program. When supported by a suite of continuous data loggers and a community of concerned employees or campus partners, an early spot-measure assessment strategy can achieve significant, initial progress in library collection preservation, even in small and medium-sized academic libraries.

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Peer-Reviewed Article

Faculty Outreach Approaches in Business Librarianship

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ABSTRACT

Business disciplines present distinctive pedagogical and research information needs which in turn require equally distinctive outreach methods. This paper looks to provide a set of adaptable, practice-based approaches that operationalize outreach competencies for academic business librarians. Rather than presenting formal case studies, the paper offers applied examples that demonstrate how relational, digital, event-based, and curricular outreach can be developed and sustained across different institutional settings. The approaches presented serve as transferable models to guide both new and experienced librarians in designing outreach based on authenticity, creativity, and collaboration. This work contributes to the literature on subject-specific outreach by situating business librarianship within larger discussions of engagement and liaison practice.

KEYWORDS

business librarianship, faculty outreach, relationship-building

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Introduction

In academic libraries, having an outreach mindset means being devoted to connecting with the campus community through strategic planning of marketing endeavors using a variety of communications platforms (Polger, 2019). While many academic libraries have outreach librarians, these roles often focus on institution-wide marketing of library services rather than on the needs of specialized resources and services (Dennis, 2012). However, liaison librarians, often referred to by other terms such as library liaisons, subject bibliographers, subject librarians, and subject specialists, assume responsibility for outreach with the areas and departments they support (Tennant et al., 2006). Although the liaison terminology clearly varies across institutions, these titles describe the same function: a librarian responsible for connecting a specific academic department with library resources and services. Though outreach may be an expectation of these roles, it is reasonable to assume that some librarians, especially those new to the profession, may lack formal training or guidance in marketing and communications. This raises a practical question: where should those without departmental experience or expertise in engaging an audience begin?

Although case studies on outreach exist, it can be difficult to synthesize literature that addresses outreach in the specific context of business librarianship. Doing so is important for several reasons, but primarily because business disciplines often present distinctive pedagogical and research needs (e.g., market data, industry analysis, private company information) that can directly inform outreach strategy.

As such, the authors were interested in creating a set of outreach approaches that business librarians could use as a foundation when thinking of, or rethinking, methods. Rather than offering formal case studies with structured methodologies, this paper offers practice-based models intended to operationalize outreach competencies in business liaison contexts. The examples presented here look to occupy the often-overlooked middle ground between anecdotal descriptions in smaller papers and empirical studies.

Literature Review

Entering an academic liaison role previously held by another librarian can be both exciting and intimidating. The transition often involves balancing respect for established practices with the need to develop one's own professional identity. When the liaison model itself is still emerging or loosely defined on a campus, that challenge deepens, as new librarians must not only learn the institutional structure, but also articulate the purpose and value of their position to faculty and administrators. In such contexts, onboarding becomes essential, and such onboarding often extends beyond department introductions or procedural overviews to include intentional connections with university faculty in areas such as assessment, scholarly communication, and scholarly publishing (Riesen, 2024; Hess et al., 2023). These early relationships are not merely informative but form the foundation for collaborative partnerships that strengthen liaison work overtime.

This early investment in relationship-building is particularly important given the expanding yet still ambiguous expectations of outreach in liaison roles. Although outreach duties are increasingly dispersed across library functions, clear definitions and shared practices remain inconsistent (Salamon, 2016). On a surface level, outreach serves to increase awareness of library resources and services. Yet for liaison librarians, outreach is far more relational than promotional. As Diaz (2019) notes, outreach unfolds incrementally, through repeated interactions that gradually build credibility and rapport. When university faculty are the intended audience, successful outreach depends less on marketing and more on cultivating connections (Eva & Shea, 2015). Once that credibility is established, liaisons can begin to design more targeted and flexible support methods, ranging from one-shot sessions and assignment consultations to asynchronous learning materials or fully embedded instruction models (Cook, 2024). These forms of engagement shift awareness into partnership and help ensure that outreach efforts result in meaningful collaboration.

The liaison literature reflects this trajectory with steady movement from transactional, service-based interactions toward the adaptation of relationship-building roles where partnership is the goal (Peacemaker et al., 2024). Reports such as *New Roles for New Times: Transforming Liaison Roles* detail the importance of deeper disciplinary involvement and co-creative collaboration with faculty (Jaguszewski & Williams, 2013). Parallel work on embedded librarianship extends these ideas by outlining concrete ways that librarians can integrate into courses, programs, or research projects to improve access and scholarly outcomes (Kvenild & Calkins, 2011; Shumaker, 2012). Recent historical analyses confirm that the subject librarian position has continually evolved in response to institutional change, even as its core liaison functions have remained remarkably stable (Wilson, 2024). Wilson, Campbell, and Beals (2024) further clarify how subject librarian definitions and duties serve as connective tissue between the library and the university. Collectively, these perspectives describe the same qualities that define effective outreach--proximity, continuity, and responsiveness--and suggest that the future of liaison work depends as much on relational trust as on technical expertise.

Within this liaisonship evolution, business librarianship presents a distinctive case. Unlike other liaison areas, business librarians must navigate a landscape of specialized, often proprietary resources, including market data platforms, industry analysis tools, and company financial databases, which require both subject expertise and sustained vendor relationships (Sturgeon et al., 2024). These resource demands, combined with the applied, professionally oriented culture of business schools, mean that outreach to business faculty cannot simply replicate general liaison strategies. Faculty in business disciplines frequently prioritize real-time data and competitive intelligence over traditional scholarly sources, which fundamentally informs how librarians must communicate their value. A recent scoping review of concepts in business librarianship confirms that the field's unique information landscape requires outreach approaches tailored to the data-driven, fast-paced expectations of business programs (Sturgeon et al., 2024). Moreover, business liaisons often manage highly targeted departmental relationships without formal training in marketing, communications, or business pedagogy (Dennis, 2012; Lim, 2022). Lim (2022) notes that new academic business librarians face a steep professional development curve, reinforcing the need for practice-based guidance. As a result, there is a growing need for adaptable, experience-based methods that reflect the applied and interdisciplinary nature of business education. One useful example comes from North Carolina State University, where a liaison supporting entrepreneurship developed a three-stage approach to outreach; first, identifying campus events such as innovation challenges as entry points; second, cultivating connections with faculty through shared initiatives; and third, sustaining those collaborations through joint projects that integrate library expertise into entrepreneurship courses (Chung, 2010). This model demonstrates how business librarians can strategically position themselves within campus programs.

Recent practitioner insights reinforce these lessons by emphasizing value-driven engagement and thoughtful navigation of academic hierarchies as central to effective outreach (Silver, 2015; Kalinowski, 2023). Productive faculty conversations often begin not with a presentation of library resources, but with genuine curiosity about research-related issues, such as difficulty locating market data for a case study. Approaching deans or program coordinators can support these efforts in top-down business structures, while ongoing personal touches, such as congratulatory notes on publications, can help sustain relationships. In particular, a phased strategy may be useful, including concise "elevator pitches" during department meetings, focused workshops on tools relevant to applied business topics, and eventually, deeper collaborations. In all cases, consistent follow-up and feedback, through surveys, check-ins, or informal conversations, ensure that outreach remains aligned with the fast-paced culture of business education.

Methodology

Aimed at establishing professional outreach competencies, Metzger and Jackson (2022) conducted a mixed-methods study through an analysis of Library and Information Science literature, job advertisements, and survey results from academic librarians. In 2022, a final white paper supporting the competencies was drafted by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) University Libraries Section Academic Outreach Committee, describing them as the behaviors, knowledge, and skills needed for this work. The eighteen competencies can be found at: https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/outreach.

As such, the authors of this paper base their presentation on nine of the eighteen proposed competencies: emotional intelligence, communication, marketing, creativity, advocacy, collaboration, networking, teaching, and user engagement. These selected nine are discussed and utilized to build a framework for outreach methods, giving readers the information needed to visualize techniques. The authors highlight the importance of each competency in four faculty-outreach approaches, starting from grassroots relationship-building to full collaboration and curricular integration. For each approach, the title is accompanied by the name of the author whose experience from which it is pulling. Therefore, in drawing on case study traditions in which detailed accounts are used to interpret a phenomenon (Greenhalgh, 2025), this approach leans on providing practice-based details to create a systematic guide to the implementation process.

In showcasing the application of the nine competencies, the authors attempt to align academic librarian outreach practices to the needed behavior, knowledge, and skills discussed in the ACRL white paper. Despite the abundance of examples in the existing library outreach literature, this work makes several distinctive contributions while making room for the competencies to help outline outreach approaches. First, it grounds outreach practices in a competency-based framework, demonstrating how these competencies apply to everyday liaison responsibilities. Second, it connects theoretical outreach discussions to the real-world demands of collaborating with business departments. Third, it makes clear the unique challenges of business librarianship, which necessitate outreach approaches attuned to faculty expectations and disciplinary norms. Adapting and personalizing use of competencies creates an understanding of how and when to apply them during outreach initiatives and everyday interactions, resulting in a type of practice-based system that can serve as established routines to maintain best practices.

Practice-Based Approaches and Examples

Approach 1: Everyday Encounters and Relationship Building

Competencies: Emotional Intelligence; Communication

This approach involves creating informal opportunities to begin building relationships with faculty, which as has been noted, is the foundation of sustained outreach. Research suggests that faculty often prefer face-to-face interaction with librarians (Faulk & Crist, 2020), yet for librarians initiating these conversations, such situations can feel daunting. The approaches below address common barriers and offer ways to navigate them effectively.

Developing emotional intelligence is central to this process. It involves self-awareness, empathy, and self-care that support stronger professional relationships. Communication should be adaptive, persuasive, clear, and well organized, all qualities that enable effective faculty engagement (Metzger & Jackson, 2022).

Case 1: Everyday Encounters as Outreach (Narvaez)

As a first-time business-school liaison supporting Texas A&M University-San Antonio, Narvaez entered her role with both excitement and uncertainty. Though encouraged by library leadership to connect with instructors across departments, she received a word of caution from colleagues not to come across as overly assertive. Balancing the urgency of outreach expectations with a wish to build authentic, lasting relationships, Narvaez sought a softer, more intuitive approach. With guidance from experienced peers, she began experimenting with spontaneous, informal interactions, treating visits to the business-school building as an opportunity rather than an obligation. Much like navigating a high-school hallway, she found that a casual walk could turn into a meaningful exchange when paired with a warm smile and a friendly question.

At the start of each semester, she began walking through departmental spaces, opening conversations with approachable prompts like, "How are your classes going?" or "I saw you're teaching a new course, how's it going so far?" and concluding with, "Well, let me know if I can help out." These low-pressure interactions offered a window into faculty routines while signaling her availability without being intrusive. Emotional intelligence played an important role in gauging responses. If a faculty member offered only a quick nod or short answer, she respected their boundaries; if someone lingered or showed interest, she leaned in a bit more. Over time, Narvaez learned to read the nuances of faculty communication styles. Some preferred brief, polite exchanges, which still laid the groundwork for future engagement. Others opened up quickly, discussing everything from teaching challenges to weekend plans. These organic conversations, whether held in hallways, at campus coffee shops, or during faculty mixers, slowly built a network of trust.

As her comfort level grew, so did the scope of her engagement. She began attending department events more regularly and offered support where appropriate, such as guest lectures, tailored database tutorials, and even offered to step in when faculty needed to miss a class. One particularly impactful collaboration emerged from informal conversations and culminated in an Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved study that examined the effectiveness of a hybrid instructional model blending in-person sessions with online research instruction.

Ultimately, for librarians navigating new liaison roles, particularly in large, decentralized departments, like those within business schools, small interactions can lead to big results. The consistency in meeting faculty where they are (literally and figuratively) sets the stage for social conversations and a chance at collaborating (Tuamsuk & Lan, 2022). This case illustrates how developing emotional intelligence and adaptive communication, two of the nine competencies framing this paper, can transform everyday encounters into the foundation for sustained outreach.

Case 2: Making Office Hours Visible (Nicolosi)

The practice of librarians holding office hours is not new; however, the literature on its effectiveness is surprisingly sparse and often anecdotal. Here, "office hours" refers to a librarian dedicating set times each week in a designated space within liaison departments to answer questions and conduct consultations. The goal is to reduce friction for patrons, especially faculty, who might otherwise need to travel to the library or wait for email responses. Some contexts include office hours as part of embedded roles (e.g., program-embedded librarianship such as described in Kvenild & Calkins, 2011; Shumaker, 2012). In other cases, librarians independently pilot and develop the practice. An ACRL blog post, for example, described how, for one librarian, self-initiated office hours allowed for informal interactions where faculty were reminded of previously unarticulated questions and needs (Brown, 2008).

Seeking to enhance access to the library at her own institution, Nicolosi initiated formal office hours in her role as liaison to three departments-Business, Economics, and Engineering Management-in which she served between 50 and 70 faculty members in total. She chose buildings where faculty from multiple areas naturally converged and then scheduled twice-weekly, two-hour blocks. After securing department head approval, she worked with administrative assistants to select visible, high-traffic rooms. Once times and locations were confirmed, she announced the schedule to liaison departments via email, coordinated listserv reminders with administrative assistants, and shared updates during university-wide faculty-senate meetings. Office-hour slots were also added to her research-consultation system (SpringShare) so patrons could select an in-department meeting time if needed.

To increase visibility, she set up a table banner and wore a name tag each session so passersby could easily identify her as a librarian. In the first semester, faculty began sending graduate students for research consultations, a practice consistent with observed information need patterns at her institution. Even when formal interactions eventually subsided, casual conversations remained common, as faculty who regularly walked past the rooms would stop to introduce themselves or ask quick questions. As discussed in other outreach methods, these early, low-stakes encounters made subsequent outreach more welcome because faculty had grown accustomed to seeing their librarian. However, if office hours decline in utility over time, they can be reduced or discontinued; yet, as a visibility and approachability are proactive measures to gain faculty engagement (Wilson, 2023). Here, the competencies of emotional intelligence and communication are operationalized through physical presence and attentiveness to faculty cues.

Approach 2: Outreach through Digital Communication

Competencies: Marketing; Creativity; Advocacy

According to Metzger and Jackson (2022), well-designed marketing materials also help maintain the library's brand and reputation, encouraging librarians to think creatively about how they communicate their value. When digital materials directly highlight services and resources relevant to faculty needs, they can promote meaningful engagement (Eva & Shea, 2015).

Silver (2015) suggests including a variety of elements in outreach materials, such as resources, services, news, and events; a column in departmental mass emails (with permission); and options like newsletters, websites, fliers, posters, or social media. Librarians should weigh the benefits and drawbacks of using print versus digital materials. If hand delivered, print materials increase the likelihood that faculty will physically encounter the item; however, digital communication reduces waste and allows for wider reach.

Outreach is also strengthened when faculty or staff within a department, such as an administrative assistant or department head, forward the librarian's materials, since communication from intradepartmental members is more likely to be read (Metzger & Jackson, 2022; Faulk & Crist, 2020).

Case 3: Personalizing Email Outreach (Nicolosi)

To begin digital faculty outreach efforts, conducted alongside the outreach methods described in Approach 1, Nicolosi decided to send out mass emails to instructors in liaison departments, assuming this would be the most efficient way to connect regarding library instruction sessions.

For Nicolosi, these instruction sessions typically range from brief, one-time sessions, often specific to class projects, to visits in graduate student labs or other instructional settings. However, after trying this method for two semesters, it became clear that mass emails were ineffective, as few faculty responded and invitations to teach in classrooms were infrequent. Recognizing that a different approach was necessary, Nicolosi developed a spreadsheet-based communication tracking method via Excel, in which emails were sent to instructors individually.

At the beginning of each semester, Nicolosi creates a new version of the spreadsheet by copying over faculty data from previous terms. This document acts as a record and helps track several areas:

- **Faculty Information:** Name, department, and faculty type (tenure-track, non-tenure-track, adjunct, etc.)

- **Instruction History:** Whether the author has provided instruction sessions for them in the past and the topics covered
- **Response Patterns:** Whether faculty responded to emails, how frequently, and in what manner
- **Email Outreach:** If outreach was conducted that semester and whether a response was received
- **Follow-up Notes:** If they requested an instruction session or other support, along with details regarding the interaction

This approach allows Nicolosi to send personalized emails (see Appendix A for examples) rather than general messages. For example, for faculty with whom the author has previously collaborated, past instruction sessions or projects are referenced to reinforce relationships. For instructors who have not engaged in previous semesters, outreach strategies are adjusted accordingly. For instance, if it's apparent that the faculty member might not teach any class relevant to library instruction but does have a lab of graduate students, Nicolosi suggests meeting with the graduate student lab. If a faculty member does not reply to emails after several attempts across semesters, it may indicate that continued outreach is unnecessary. Conversely, faculty members who consistently engage with emails, either by thanking or asking another question, even if unrelated to instruction, are prioritized for future outreach.

Beyond engagement tracking, the spreadsheet system is helpful for monitoring faculty turnover and departmental changes. Faculty rosters do not always update in real time, and it is common for new faculty to be hired or others to leave without immediate online visibility, especially during the spring semester when campus-wide new faculty lists are not always published. Identifying new faculty hires early allows for introductions and direct email opportunities.

The ability to observe these patterns over multiple semesters is helpful for faculty engagement and allows for more effective time management. This system ensures that no faculty member is overlooked, especially those who may not have previously requested instruction, but could benefit from library support in the future. Furthermore, research on faculty outreach within librarianship supports this engagement approach. Numerous studies suggest that effective faculty-librarian collaboration is best achieved through strategic relationship-building rather than generalized communication efforts (Leeder, 2011; Peacemaker et al., 2024).

While upkeep of this tracking system requires some effort, it is minimal, and the benefits outweigh any potential time constraints. Over time, this approach has strengthened faculty relationships and increased interest in library instruction sessions for Nicolosi. For example, after successfully reaching out through personalized emails, Nicolosi was invited to provide instruction for a senior-level Economics course taught by a faculty member who had never incorporated a librarian into her class. Quantitatively, the spreadsheet tracking method has allowed the author to increase the number of instruction sessions she delivers each semester, from around two to ten. By applying the competencies of marketing and creativity to tailor each email, and the competency of advocacy to persistently communicate the library's value, this systematic approach demonstrates how personalized outreach can yield measurable results.

Case 4: Newsletters that Resonate (Narvaez)

Subject librarians at the University of Central Florida create e-newsletters at the start of every semester, relaying information about new materials and guides that help users navigate databases (The Subject Librarians Newsletter, University of Central Florida). Inspired by this model, Narvaez began incorporating newsletters into her own communication strategy after several years of employment with Texas A&M–San Antonio. As her ongoing conversations with business faculty evolved, so did their needs for updates on new materials, procedures for working with the library, upcoming events, and other general information. In fact, many of her brief, informal interactions with faculty began ending with the same reassurance that their questions or concerns would be addressed in her upcoming newsletter.

During her time at Texas A&M, Narvaez adopted use of Smore, a digital newsletter platform, because of its affordability, built-in metrics, and versatility. Creating digital materials requires a different type of creativity than face-to-face outreach, especially since such platforms often push the boundaries of an institution's branding policies. Smore's templates allowed Narvaez to experiment within those limits, producing visually appealing newsletters that still aligned with university guidelines. Many of the materials featured, such as tutorials or research guides, were hosted in SpringShare, while Smore provided flexibility to customize images, logos, colors, and fonts. This balance between institutional branding and personal style gave Narvaez the freedom to develop a recognizable design identity.

To add further variety and personality, Narvaez added short films into her newsletters, giving librarians across the library an opportunity to contribute. One memorable series included YouTube videos styled as silent films, an unconventional yet humorous touch that sparked interesting conversations with faculty. As readership grew, so did the metrics collected through Smore. Although fall semesters typically saw higher engagement than spring, overall views showed a modest upward trend, gaining approximately five to ten additional readers each year. Her college dean, who regularly forwarded the newsletter to faculty members, also supported this growth.

Narvaez continued using Smore after moving to the University of Arkansas, where she helped build the College of Business's internal website. The site included a dedicated page highlighting her role and the library's resources and services, with archived newsletters embedded for easy access. When faculty later requested information, Narvaez could direct them to both the website and previous newsletters.

At her current institution, the University of Utah, Smore has become unallowable due to institutional security restrictions. However, Narvaez has explored alternatives. For instance, Hutchinson (2025) describes the growing potential of the LinkedIn newsletter platform, which offers robust analytics and professional visibility. An example of a newsletter can be found in Appendix B. Throughout this process, the competencies of creativity and marketing were critical, as Narvaez continually adapted her communication tools and design choices to maintain faculty engagement across changing institutional contexts.

Approach 3: Faculty Engagement through Events and Programs

Competencies: Creativity; Collaboration; Marketing; Networking

Library programming promotes the collections and services that meet the personal and educational needs of the community (Metzger & Jackson, 2022). In an academic setting, partnerships can develop with any and every department across campus, and with the surrounding community. Through these collaborative efforts, responsibilities are shared, and goals are established, allowing the library to actively promote its resources (Metzger & Jackson, 2022). Developing partnerships and hosting shared events build connections and solidify outreach efforts (Longmeier, 2021), while also creating opportunities for creative collaboration and visibility.

These networking opportunities cultivate relationships and build trust as common goals are achieved (Metzger & Jackson, 2022). Such collaborations provide opportunities for professional development, for showcasing information, and for strengthening connections across campus. The creativity and initiative of sponsors and volunteers can make a lasting impression, opening doors to future events, scholarship opportunities, or participation in curriculum development.

When multiple departments or partners collaborate, the shared expertise can expand both the scope and purpose of an event, and the avenues through which it is marketed. To ensure strong participation, multiple announcements in different formats are necessary, including timely reminders such as a forty-eight-hour notice before the event (Stebelman et al., 1999).

Case 5: Faculty Author Event (Nicolosi)

As the sole business librarian at a small university, Nicolosi has found it challenging to organize events tailored for the business faculty. In her view, library programming often leans toward campus-wide initiatives or collaborative efforts across colleges rather than events focused on individual faculty groups.

With this in mind, Nicolosi and her colleagues shifted their focus. Instead of targeting a single department, they decided to develop faculty-focused events that would resonate across campus. After several brainstorming sessions, the idea of a Faculty Author Event, held annually at the end of each semester, was finalized.

These events are designed to celebrate faculty scholarship and strengthen campus connections. Each year, librarians gather a list of books published by university faculty over the past twelve months. They then write their own summaries of each book to emphasize the scope of each work. Ideally, librarians summarize and present the work of the faculty in their liaison areas. The evening event, scheduled for 6 p.m. to accommodate teaching schedules, is open to the public. Faculty, students, and families gather as librarians introduce each book and its author, followed by a reception with drinks, catered food, and opportunities to mingle. Attendees can browse a display of the featured books and chat informally with the authors. The setup and promotion of the display are, therefore, relatively straightforward. Liaison librarians email college deans and business administration staff to ask for the event information to be passed on to faculty. Promotion is also done via the university's weekly marketing and communication newsletter and posted on the university's communication website. Finally, the library promotes this event internally via social media platforms, fliers, and digital signs. Attendees are required to register for the event, so the library knows the amount of food and drinks to provide, and catering is done via the university's catering service.

The impact of these events is multi-faceted. Primarily, they provide a spotlight on the scholarly contributions of faculty. This kind of recognition can enhance a university's reputation and help attract prospective faculty and students. Beyond that, the events offer students a new perspective, one that extends beyond the classroom. Just as importantly, these events strengthen ties between faculty and the library (Safin & Kiner, 2020). For professors in fields less traditionally associated with library use, the Faculty Author Event may be one of the few touchpoints they have with librarians.

Looking ahead, Nicolosi hopes to adapt the model to spotlight specific faculty groups, specifically those in business. The author also hopes to develop events such as those centered around financial literacy or other business-focused topics that involve business faculty as speakers or participants. Starting with campus-wide, library-held events that incorporate business faculty, though not at the forefront, is a first step in that direction and continues strengthening relationships between librarians and faculty members. This case demonstrates how the competencies of collaboration and networking operate in tandem; collaborative event planning creates the conditions for networking, which in turn opens doors to future partnerships.

Case 6: Reimagining Money Smart Week (Narvaez)

Money Smart Week (MSW) was a national campaign launched by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago to provide educational opportunities in financial literacy (Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, 2018). By partnering with educational, financial, and community organizations, the program offered free informational seminars on personal finance and financial decision-making. Volunteers from professional organizations were invited to lead these discussions, with one guiding rule - no sales pitches.

As the new business librarian at Texas A&M University-San Antonio, Narvaez inherited coordination of the MSW program from her predecessor. The event had long been a collaboration between the College of Business (CoB) faculty and the library, primarily focused on supporting students in entrepreneurial studies.

During her tenure, Narvaez took the opportunity to revamp and reimagine the program. Before her redesign, MSW typically featured guest speakers from entrepreneurial funding organizations, followed by a panel discussion led by local entrepreneurs. Participants were encouraged to ask questions as conversations unfolded. However, Narvaez began to notice a pattern in how questions were being posed and answered. While the speakers and panelists offered valuable insight, their responses were often tied to personal experiences rather than broadly applicable advice (Narvaez, 2018). Many of the questions, she realized, might have been better addressed by professionals from other industries, such as insurance or marketing, whose perspectives could provide more practical, context-specific guidance.

ACRL's outreach competency of creativity extends beyond marketing materials to include innovative program design. Drawing on this principle, Narvaez researched alternative event formats and determined that roundtable discussions would best align with her vision. This format allowed her to enlist representatives from various organizations that worked directly with entrepreneurs. By cultivating a more personable and conversational atmosphere, these volunteers were able to tailor their guidance to participants' specific questions and needs.

By centering the program on participant engagement and applying creativity to the event's structure, Narvaez transformed MSW into a dynamic, discussion-based learning experience. The redesigned format created a more responsive and relevant program, but it also revealed continued demand for similar opportunities. Many participants followed up afterward, expressing interest in additional events. Recognizing this growing momentum, the CoB faculty conducted an environmental scan to identify other campus partners doing related work and subsequently sought collaboration with the Career Services department. The Career Services team contributed new ideas that expanded the program's scope and reach.

Through this expanded network, volunteers were recruited more efficiently, and marketing efforts grew; attendance grew noticeably, and post-event surveys showed that participants included faculty, staff, students, and community members alike. Narvaez's redesign of Money Smart Week demonstrates how applying creativity and collaboration to an established event can reinvigorate outreach, improve impact, and create lasting partnerships across campus.

Approach 4: Partnering in Curriculum Development

Competencies: Collaboration; Teaching; User Engagement

Services are patron-focused approaches designed to meet the needs of students, faculty, and the campus community (Metzger & Jackson, 2022). Examples include research consultations and workshops, which help connect users directly with the resources and skills they need. In this context, liaison librarians often serve as the bridge between assignments and subject-specific materials. When teaching, pedagogical methods are employed to design, deliver, and assess participant experiences (Metzger & Jackson, 2022). Through these methods, instruction can take many forms, including classroom visits, asynchronous online tutorials, library research guides, and embedded librarianship.

Promoting user engagement often occurs beyond the library, within academic departments or in virtual environments where students and faculty already interact (Metzger & Jackson, 2022). For example, when faculty include scholarly materials in their assignments, students may seek help from librarians to navigate them effectively. Asking for course and faculty information, in turn, creates an opportunity to contact instructors and offer support through asynchronous tutorials or embedded collaboration. In these settings, embedded librarians provide problem-solving assistance in teaching, learning, and the research and data management process (Mushi et al., 2022).

Although embedded librarianship offers an especially useful way to encourage patron engagement, online instructional materials extend that impact by remaining available around the clock. Together, these complementary approaches allow librarians to integrate information literacy directly into the curriculum. To do this work effectively, competencies in communication, interpersonal interaction, teaching, research, collaboration and coordination, and emerging technologies are essential at every stage of developing and sustaining partnerships (Shamim et al., 2024).

Case 7: Planning Your Pitch: Tutorial and Workshop (Narvaez)

Collaborations with faculty during the aforementioned IRB study gave Narvaez the data needed to devise a personal set of guidelines to follow when creating asynchronous online tutorials, as she has found that online pedagogical options offer a variety of learning opportunities that surpass the availability of an embedded librarian (Matlin & Lantzy, 2017). Since then, tutorials that both scaffold in-person instruction and those that can stand alone have become valuable tools in supporting her librarianship.

The limits of a 10-minute one-shot instruction with a marketing class created an opportunity to build a new level of teaching. During class time, Narvaez introduced students to the library research guide on marketing materials and briefly showcased a few databases. Narvaez then designed a tutorial, titled *Planning Your Pitch*, which demonstrates how to locate specific data within business databases and how to apply that information to meet the assignment requirements of a business pitch. To encourage further engagement, Narvaez made completing the tutorial a requirement for attending the workshop. This approach was designed to promote high-level thinking and guide students through a structured path of resources leading to the segment of information that made each project unique.

After several years of working with this assignment and assisting students during research consultations, Narvaez pinpointed the stage at which students most often needed individualized assistance. In this structure, the tutorial scaffolded the one-shot instruction, while the workshop extended both lessons by transitioning into a flipped classroom format (Jian, 2019). The workshop cultivated a student-centered atmosphere where participants understood the learning objectives and were provided with a collaborative platform to build on their skills.

The workshop followed a round-robin format in which each participant was invited to ask questions and receive immediate feedback. Narvaez tailored each response with a discussion on how data found in reports could be applied to sections of the assignment. As others listened, they began to develop a stronger understanding of their own approach, which in turn prompted more in-depth questions and discussion.

The assignment itself required students to create a marketing plan and develop a pitch promoting a new product for an existing company. As a new business librarian at the University of Utah specializing in entrepreneurial studies, Narvaez sought to build connections with the university's entrepreneurial community, including the Lassonde Institute, a nationally recognized center for innovation and entrepreneurship. Participants spend time developing a product or service and are coached to deliver pitch to secure funding in order to launch a business. Revamping the tutorial designed for the marketing class led to an additional version created specifically for these aspiring entrepreneurs. As with any pitch, details regarding competition, industry trends, market entry points, and dynamics of the target market are essential.

Narvaez introduced the tutorial in an outreach email to the Lassonde Institute's director of education, establishing a professional connection that has since resulted in serving as a guest speaker. During her visit, Narvaez provides demonstrations of library databases specific to company, industry, market, and marketing and discusses applications of the material for entrepreneurial endeavors. The tutorial reinforces these lessons with general information and demonstrations of library databases (see Appendix C for outline). The main takeaway from her presentations remains the online tutorial *Planning Your Pitch*. As Narvaez continues to learn about the evolving research needs of this community, she anticipates incorporating new information and technologies in future updates of the tutorial. The goal here was to strengthen connections between the entrepreneurial community and the library's research services and instructional resources. By scaffolding instruction across multiple formats, Narvaez created a learning pathway that met students at different stages of readiness while deepening collaboration with faculty and campus partners, demonstrating the interplay of teaching and engagement.

Case 8: Integrating Business Research into Courses (Nicolosi)

Librarians being integrated into business school curricula is not uncommon and has been written about (Liu, 2015; Grauel & Ziedses des Planetes, 2024), but it can take many different forms depending on institutional context. Factors like university size, the presence of an information science program, or how well the library is embedded into campus culture can influence the level of involvement. When faculty aren't fully aware of what the library can offer, it becomes even more difficult to form meaningful partnerships. Still, many universities have found creative ways to integrate librarians deeper into the classroom experience. In some cases, business librarians are even invited to teach full-credit courses on business research. For those working in more isolated or resource-constrained environments, integration may need to begin with smaller, more strategic steps.

This case example demonstrates ways librarians can begin embedding themselves into the curriculum, even without a preexisting connection. Nicolosi has experienced both ends of the spectrum. At The Pennsylvania State University (Penn State), she was part of a large team of business librarians with an established presence in business courses. Moving to a smaller university presented new challenges and opportunities to apply what she had learned in a different way. At the Missouri University of Science and Technology (Missouri S&T), her approach began with identifying courses where librarian involvement would be especially valuable, such as those requiring involved research, data analysis, and advanced resource navigation. In particular, Nicolosi discovered that students in an engineering management capstone course are tasked with conducting in-depth corporate research, including financial data analysis and industry benchmarking.

Recognizing the complexity of the assignment, Nicolosi emailed the capstone course instructor and asked if it would be helpful to create a detailed research tip sheet. The tip sheet walks students through how to access and use six major resources, including library databases and publicly available information like 10-K reports. For instance, under the tip sheet's section on the *Mergent Market Atlas* database, students are given step-by-step instructions on how to locate financial statements, compare companies, and export data for their reports. After liking the tip sheet and observing its usefulness, the capstone instructor later invited Nicolosi to provide a 20-minute in-class session to introduce students to these tools, forming a partnership that has now extended over multiple semesters. Overall, this series of events demonstrates a scalable way to demonstrate the value of librarian involvement and begin building toward further integration in the future.

At Penn State, librarian integration was already embedded in the business curriculum, notably within a foundational course required for business majors typically taken in their first or second year, including a significant business research project. This project tasks students with exploring various dimensions of an assigned company, including financial information, industry trends, and sustainability practices. Students must utilize between four and ten library databases along with company websites and current news to evaluate organizational ethics and practices. Given the project's research requirements, librarians play an important role in guiding students through resource navigation.

At the start of each semester, business librarians visit class sections of the course to introduce themselves, explain the research project, inform students about librarian support available, and discuss the value of developing research skills. This visit typically lasts fifteen minutes and allows students to become familiar with the business librarians. Students subsequently use an online, internal scheduling platform to book librarian sessions, typically attended by six to eight students in person or up to fifteen virtually. During these sessions, librarians familiarize students with the library databases and demonstrate methods to effectively locate open-access resources. Following the initial orientation, students can maintain communication with librarians via email or schedule additional sessions for further support.

While not all institutions have the infrastructure to immediately implement this level of librarian involvement, Nicolosi’s experiences demonstrate that smaller, incremental efforts can also contribute meaningfully to student success. These measures serve as steps toward future curricular integration, ultimately demonstrating librarians’ roles as partners in developing research competencies. Across both institutional contexts, the competencies of collaboration and teaching were essential, as collaboration was employed to establish and sustain faculty partnerships, and teaching was employed to design instruction that aligned with course-specific learning outcomes.

Limitations

This paper offers concrete examples for business liaison librarians to enhance their outreach, but several limitations should be recognized. First, the cases presented arose from the authors’ own institutional contexts. Approaches that were effective in these environments may not translate directly to libraries that vary in size, resources, or culture. Second, since the examples are experiential, the paper does not include empirical measures such as quantitative data on faculty engagement or resource usage. This may restrict the ability to generalize findings across settings. Another limitation pertains to the competencies themselves. Although the outreach initiatives described here align with those articulated by Metzger and Jackson (2022), these competencies are relatively new and have not yet been widely tested or validated in varying academic library contexts. Other frameworks, or competencies not discussed here, may prove equally or more effective in guiding outreach. Additionally, both authors are business librarians, which means all cases reflect a single disciplinary perspective; no outside practitioners validated whether these approaches transfer to other business library programs, let alone to liaison work in other subject areas. Finally, the success of outreach largely depends on individual skill sets and personal styles; what works for one librarian's interpersonal approach may not suit another's, making replication inherently variable.

Conclusion

Outreach in academic libraries relies on creativity, adaptability, and a relationship-centered approach. However, basing initiatives in structured competencies like those outlined by Metzger and Jackson (2022) provides librarians with a framework for faculty engagement while allowing for adaptation. The approaches discussed in this paper can be adjusted to suit different institutional cultures and individual strengths. At the same time, recognizing limitations, whether institutional differences, resource constraints, or the variable nature of interpersonal relationships, helps set realistic expectations for outreach work. Ultimately, this piece demonstrates the unique role of liaison librarians, in particular business librarians, not just in promoting resources and services, but in contributing to academic success and creating partnerships with faculty across specialized disciplines.

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Appendix A

Example 1:

Hi [Faculty Member's Name],

I hope you're doing well and ready for the new semester!

As we approach the start of the academic year, I wanted to offer my support for your classes this fall, whether it's giving a guest lecture, creating custom instructional materials, or visiting your graduate students' lab to prepare them for the year.

For example, last semester I worked with Dr. XX in the XX department by visiting her XX class and teaching her students about ways to identify and research topics for their final project. I also created library guides [link library guide example here] to serve as information tools for future classes. Other instructional materials I can create include tutorials or other forms of recorded videos.

If you think your students could benefit from a bit of extra guidance with research skills or library resources, just let me know.

Looking forward to hearing from you!

Best,

[Your First Name]

Example 2:

Hi [Faculty Member’s Name],

I hope you had a nice summer!

As we approach the start of term, I wanted to offer my support for your classes. As an example, I

demonstrate a few research databases for Dr. XX class, as well as for courses within [insert other department names here]. If you have any classes that require students to find, read, and/or write papers, I'd be happy to provide instruction on how to use the university's research tools to do so.

Of course, if there's any other way I can help, please let me know!

Best wishes,

[Your First Name]

Appendix B

Welcome to Fall!

The University Library is here to support you and your students. Because we are an e-preferred library, we have a variety of virtual services and resources available. This includes e-resource collections, chat services, research guides, and online tutorials. As we move through this semester with you, we offer a mix of onsite and online service hours. The general operating hours for the University Library are listed below. Additional service hours are available during midterms and finals [list hours here].

What's New for You

Below are updates concerning resources selected to support the College of Business:

SAGE Business Cases 2021 (SAGE). This database is a collection of global business cases from a variety of industries. Topics include Marketing, Operations Management, Small Business and Entrepreneurship, International Business, Human Resource Management and more.

Access World News (NewsBank) 2021 Edition Delivers research on diverse perspectives, topics and trends that align with curricular areas such as Political Science, English, Sociology, Humanities, Business, International Studies and more. Features reliable, credible information from a wide variety of international, national, and local news sources.

Thomson Reuters recently changed their platform to Checkpoint Edge. It blends technology, editorial insight, productivity tools, online learning, and news updates for tax and accounting researchers to understand complex information, make informed decisions, and use knowledge efficiently. Our sales representative encourages us to get the most out of our subscription. Check out the free on-demand training resources including interactive webinars and short video tutorials.

Training is available by following these three steps:

- Step 1 - Please enter, reset, or create your login credentials on our **Thomson Reuters Tax & Accounting Professionals Learning Center**.
- Step 2 - Upon entering the Learning Center, scroll down to the "**Enter Your Subscription Code Here**" section and enter '**edge**'.
- Step 3 - Then click the **course link** to begin the training course *Checkpoint Edge for Universities*.

A Message from your Business Librarian

I maintain several research guides to showcase the resources that specifically support the College of Business. Over this past summer, I designed two new guides and added a tab on the management guide. I hope you are able to review the guides, and I welcome feedback on how to improve.

I created *Start Here!* to help College of Business students become familiar with what the University Library has to offer. It goes into detail regarding our outreach incentives, collection, tutorials, and amenities.

The guide titled Business Research FAQs branches out from the Library FAQ guide to address the needs of our business students. When designing this guide, I kept in mind specific questions from students, and their assignments about which I have learned. The guide serves as a pathfinder to direct students to the variety of resources that are available.

The Management: Library Research Guide now has the tab labeled, Healthcare Service Administration. It includes several databases and books to help students in this area of study.

Another service I provide is library presentations. I design these presentations based on a student research project where I introduce the resources that will help in completing their assignment. I am happy to visit your class or create an online tutorial. Just let me know how I can help.

Business Librarian's Report

The CoB library research guides are designed to serve as a pathfinder for your students to gather resources while working through assignments. Over this past Spring and Summer 2021 semesters they had a total of 6,718 visits.

Data Bites Workshop Series: Data, Data Everywhere

Join us this fall for a series of workshops introducing key data tools including data.census.gov, PolicyMap, and Social Explorer. Learn about the classroom resources, data training, and all the datasets that are available to you for free. With data on economics, political science, demographics, education, public health and so much more, there is something ‘data’ here for you. All workshops will be an hour long and held online via Zoom.

Library FAQ Guide: 24/7 Point of Need Library Support

This past year the library has been busy creating a self-service tool, **Library FAQ Guide**, to help students walk through some of the most commonly asked research and library questions. We know some students may not ask for help for a variety of reasons, so we wanted to create a tool to enable all of our students to be successful in their research. The content in Library FAQ is designed to be task-focused and allow students to drill down to just the piece of information they need.

Students can access the Library FAQ Guide through the library’s website on the main page. To get started, students select the box that most closely aligns with their needs on the

Library FAQ home page. Let us know what you think about our Beta Library FAQ page and help us spread the word!

University Library

[Your Name]

Business Librarian

Appendix C

Planning Your Pitch Tutorial Outline

Library Databases

1. **IBISWorld Noteworthy Sections**
    a. Executive summary – identify key points of industry progress and potential
    b. Products - identify placement of products within market
    c. Market – identify demand determinants
    d. Competitive forces - identify barriers of entry
    e. Major companies – identify base of competition
    f. Key success factors - apply details in business development of product
    g. Business environment profile – identify obstacles and catalyst within markets
2. **Plunket Reports**
    a. Details regarding financial development potential of market
3. **Nexis Uni**
    a. Company list – generate list of companies within specific industries
    b. Product search – identify market and target market trends
4. **Factiva**
    a. Companies/Markets – provides recent news on competition/products

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Peer-Reviewed Article

Exploring the Viability of the Oregon State University Library Concierge: A Ten-Year Review of Wayfinding and User Needs

Beth Filar Williams, *Oregon State University*

ABSTRACT

Wayfinding and navigating new spaces often create confusion, frustration, and anxiety for users. From architectural features to the lack of a service design lens in planning, there are many complex factors to navigate the built environment. Oregon State University's main library (Valley) is not unlike other larger research libraries with this issue. OSUL created its first temporary flexible concierge station in Fall 2015, at the library entrance for the beginning of terms. The idea of a concierge station at the beginning of term was to provide, particularly new users to campus, quick answers or referrals and in turn, to alleviate the pressure on the two public service points on the main floor. Over time, we have made assessment-driven changes based on what has been learned, along with consistency and best practices. Now, ten years later, is the concierge still viable, useful, and desirable service?

KEYWORDS

user experience, wayfinding, concierge

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Introduction

Wayfinding and navigating new spaces often create confusion, frustration, and anxiety for users. From architectural features to the lack of a service-design lens in planning, there are many complex factors to navigate the built environment. Oregon State University's (OSU) main library (Valley) is not unlike other larger research libraries with this issue, particularly over the last few years - from COVID closures to renovations and changes to services points. Back in the Fall of 2015, Valley Library created its first temporary flexible concierge station, set up in the library entrance at the beginning of terms. As described in the research article "Personalized Wayfinding Help" from 2018 (Filar Williams), the idea of a concierge station at the beginning of term was 1) to provide particularly new users to campus, quick answers or referrals and 2) to alleviate the pressure of long lines at the two public service points on the main floor. Over time, we have made assessment-driven changes based on what has been learned, along with consistency and best practices. Now, ten years later, is the concierge still a viable, useful, and desirable service? Are the evergreen directional questions still the main questions asked? What has changed regarding wayfinding in our physical spaces in the last ten years? Is the welcoming nature of this temporary concierge still a reason to continue this service?

Literature Review

Wayfinding is the study of how humans use a variety of information - from signs to visual clues - to orient themselves and navigate in a space (Mandel, 2018, p. 1). Challenges to find your way in the built environment include unique architectural features, new additions to older buildings, not applying service design in planning, lack of incorporating learning space research, and of course personal experiences of the user (Arthur & Passini, 2002). Libraries often intimidate new or potential users through their size, complexity as well as unfamiliar tools and technology. In a 2020 study in of academic libraries in India, Rakshikar and Powdwal, found most participants in university libraries felt that wayfinding was complex and not self-oriented even after attending library orientation, with the complexity of library buildings and lack of appropriate signage. Many people have spatial anxiety - a feeling of psychological anxiety or physical distress when wayfinding (Su et al., 2021). Most university library studies share that users feel confusion and stress navigating large library spaces (Mellon, 2015; McPherson, 2015; Onwuegbuzie, Jiao, & Bostick, 2004). Overall library anxiety has always been a concern and issue with new students coming to a large university building, but by improving wayfinding systems users will feel less stress and frustration when navigating a building (Arthur & Passini, 2002).

Dr. Lauren Mandel is a leading researcher on library wayfinding (Mandel, 2018) and in 2020 she conducted a review comparing the different methodologies used in wayfinding research in library buildings. Reviewing over 26 research articles, Mandel summarized which methods were used to research wayfinding in all libraries, uncovering relationships between library type and method, along with determining the efficacy of the chosen method, uncovering that wayfinding research was primarily for evaluation purposes. Either for app development, evaluating facilities signage, or understanding how people wayfind in libraries, the most common methods for wayfinding research were signage inventories and surveys followed by interviews, task completion, and then observation. Most studies used multiple methods – as they should, since one method does not provide a full picture (for example, observations cannot tell you "why"). Mandel's research is foundational for any library looking to improve the user experience, but it focuses mainly on public libraries. A key researcher for academic libraries looking at signage, wayfinding, and marketing is Mark Polger who has a few key resources to note. His article with Stempler, called "Do you see the signs?" (2013), outlines the steps involved in a comprehensive signage audit, providing a foundation for creating a signage policy, best practices guidelines, and a branding strategy for future signage. A follow up article with Stempler (2014) weaves together theory and practice of signage in an academic library considering signs as "living documents" that can adapt as libraries shift to create meaningful experiences for library users.

Digital wayfinding, such as through interactive digital displays, kiosks, and mobile apps, is where digital user experiences intersect with physical wayfinding. A key survey in 2020 by Wilkinson and Breneman reviewed 37 U.S. academic library websites, finding that 97% had some kind of digital representations of physical spaces. These are predominantly floor plans, and most were poorly designed, with non-accessible content and a lack of comprehensive information to facilitate the user journey. As many people use their mobile phone to find their way, the lack of accessible, useful floor plans online or mobile friendly versions, affects their wayfinding and experience. The 2021 academic library study in China by Su et al. used eye tracking software to research how users find their way from various types of signage and visual clues. They found highly anxious users ignored visual clues and used directional signage, but others less anxious found their way with visual and route strategies, concluding that spatial anxiety and environmental familiarity are multifariously influential to a user's wayfinding behavior performance. Agarwal and Lawrence (2014) demonstrate and share the benefits of an interactive Web-based wayfinding tool being more welcoming and scalable in large buildings to improve the user experience.

Libraries have tried many strategies to improve wayfinding for their users, as noted above, from online floor plans, and navigation tools, to in person signage or rethinking service points. As Johnston and Mandel (2014) note, the remembrances of signs decrease when the number of contained words increases. This lands well with Misenhelter (2017) who suggests ways academic libraries can improve wayfinding by addressing three key areas (visual literacy, wayfinding, and signage) through a 3-stage process – holistic signage redesign, adding in a color-coding system and creating standard recognizable images or symbols. This might also help with cultural differences - a United Kingdom university library study (2022) by Scaife and Walton, who researched international students' wayfinding through signage, indicates that visual and color can help with navigating but more so, cultural differences rely on spatial arrangements, decision making, and navigational behaviors. Schoonover and Kinsley's (2014) study showed that for wayfinding help, users ultimately preferred human interaction as the most frequent "tool." When describing remodeling and signage updates in their library, McMorran and Reynolds (2010) observed that users would seek a human to ask the same question that was literally on a sign they pushed aside or moved past to get to a service point.

Most of the literature on the usefulness and need of concierge services falls within hospitality, retirement communities, office buildings, and stores (Withiam, 1993), with little focused on concierge services in libraries. Libraries have similarities to these industries with some key components of their work providing customer-driven wayfinding solutions and responding to directional needs. An example article is by AlFattnai et al., who discuss the creation of a physical booth called the "Research Concierge Desk" within a medical center offering on-site, free, and direct consultations to researchers, thereby improving accessibility to data clinic services while clinicians are busy (2024). Maj et al. (2024) implemented a concierge device equipped with an advanced chatbot assistant in a mall as a friendly guide to help users around the large space. At Fletcher's library, way over a decade ago, they eliminated a desk altogether and had a concierge like roaming Help Zone area – "Some libraries have one desk, and other libraries have multiple service points. At the University of New South Wales (UNSW) Library there is none" (2011). The Stanford University Libraries initiated a Library Concierge Project in November of 2011, but this initiative was not physical location but library wide training so all library staff could answer general library questions no matter where they were in or around campus (Bourg, 2013). Rodriguez et al. point out the changing nature of Access Services, sharing that more libraries are shifting from quick transactional desk services to improving the holistic academic library experience - a more concierge style, with library staff in various spaces and areas to support users where and when they need it (2017). Walker (2024) shares how their public desk shifted from busy transactions with users, to more concierge style questions and referrals since the pandemic lockdown time. A 2022 article by librarians Buljung et al. at the Colorado School of Mines explores (but had not yet implemented) the concierge or boutique model idea to provide individualized, flexible, value-added services within the larger scope of the library. Though there is not a lot of literature on academic libraries providing concierge like services, the author suggests that this is happening at the various iterations of service points in libraries but not often shared in the literature.

Background and Changes over time

A concierge station in our library is a flexible, movable desk that can be rolled out into the lobby when staffed to provide a welcoming service as people enter to assist or direct them as needed. In the early years of the concierge, a lot of time was spent learning and iterating how to run a service as well as set consistency in staffing and support. Now a decade later, it's an easy to run smooth operation with new people onboarded as needed. The service continues to get staff volunteers from all library departments, often two cross departmental people. The Valley Library used to offer this service for three quarters, for only a day or two after fall term – we are a quarter school, with 10-week terms. Fall term has the most new students arriving to campus and hence is the most critical time for a concierge service. We have now eliminated Spring term concierge and sometimes Winter term is skipped. We have simplified some of the intake, added key resources and bought an actual desk with casters that lock, and a desktop that can be raised or lowered to make it more accessible. The first iteration was originally an old podium with caster wheels we put together ourselves.

Staff volunteers are coming from every department in the library – not just public services. Staff voluntarily sign up for shifts and pair up frequently with folks in other units. With this diversity in roles, staffing the concierge desk offers a wide range of knowledge and skills providing those seeking help even more. This also means staff are interacting with people they might not normally, allowing for spontaneous connection for learning and growth. Staff volunteers are also from all classifications, e.g., faculty, administrators, staff, and student staff. Even library building partners (such as IT Media Hub and our Writing Center) staff have assisted at the concierge. Filling the slots with volunteers has not been a problem, but if it is, the flexibility of this service means we just simply do not offer it that hour and users go directly to the standard desks.

During the early years, the data collection process involved jotting down questions being asked at the station on sheets of paper, with date and time. After the 2018 study, we added in a few frequently asked topics to allow a check mark tracking instead of writing out each question. This made it both easy on the staff to simply mark the sheet, but this also means the staff code the questions through their interpretation as to what category the question fits (ex: “how do I print from my own laptop” and “can I print for free in the library” could both be listed under “printing;” but are actually different themes - a how-to and a policy question.) These and other factors will be discussed later in the article.

Figure 1

Floor map demonstrating the location of the temporary concierge service station (CS) in 2015.

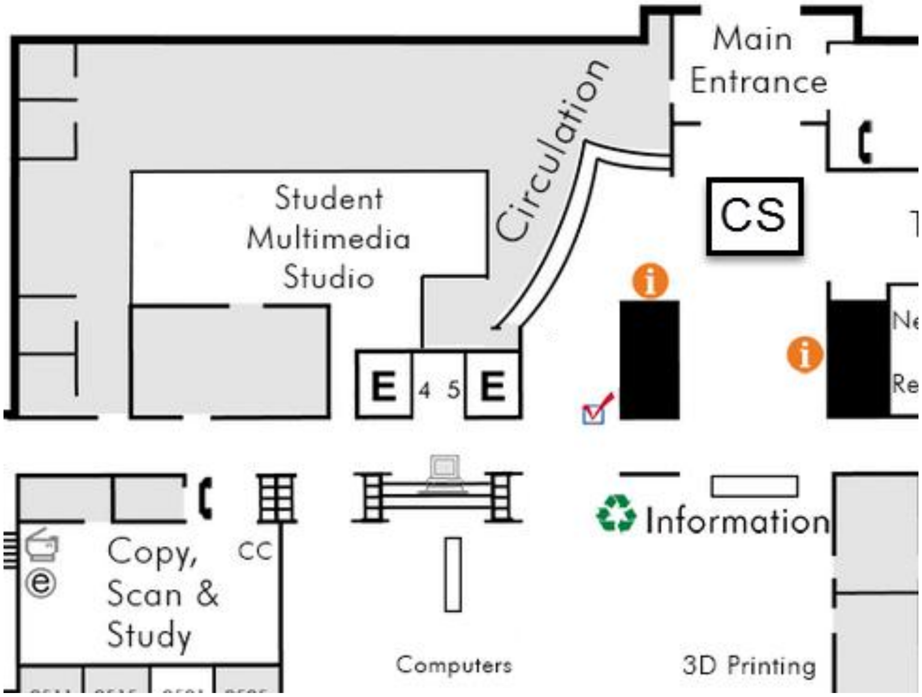
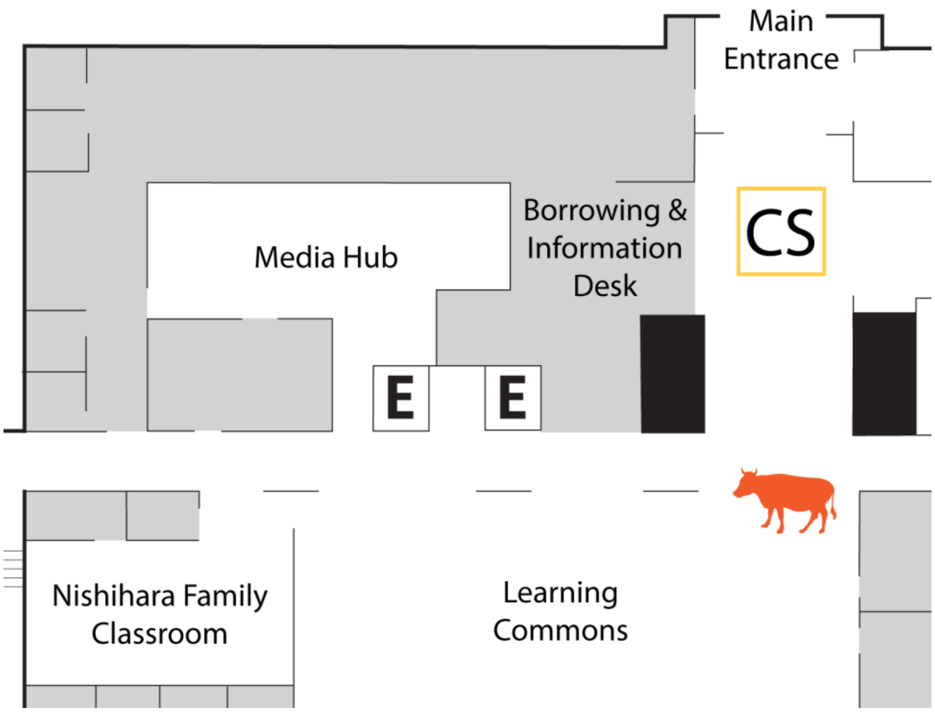


Figure 2

Floor map demonstrating the location of the temporary concierge service station (CS) in 2025.



A lot of changes in space have occurred since the last concierge data analysis (see Figures 1 and 2). Campus IT, who shared the main desk with the circulation unit, moved across the quad outside of the library building, though a small unit "Media Hub" stayed in the library, but shifted down the hall. A new partner space, a Writing Studio, was implemented on the main floor of the library adjacent to our busy learning commons. A new open classroom (Nishihara) on the main floor grew from a no longer needed "copier room" and is now used for classes or meetings but also open to students when not in use. STEM tutoring expanded on third floor and the library piloted a graduate commons area on sixth floor. As the most heavily used place on campus for printing, the library's printer relocations to a few different spots over the years impacted the visual sight line of printers when students walk into the building. Even more impactful to the main entrance was the combining of the two service points. We no longer have the information and circulation desks but have one area called Borrowing & Information. This service point expanded where our circulation suite used to be, with two approachable spots and four flexible desks, yet slightly tucked off to the side of the entrance.

Another impactful change since 2018 was the COVID-19 pandemic. Like most libraries, in those early years our library was physically closed for the pandemic and then opened but in a very limited fashion. When we finally opened fully, our concierge was severely needed. We not only had new students enrolling that year, but for a year and a half none of our students were physically onsite. In addition, many students (along with much of the general population) were also learning how to enter public spaces in general. There is lots of literature discussing the impact of COVID, but for this data analysis we are using this pandemic as one of the many complex factors affecting the possible questions asked. When COVID hit, the library shifted from a small, mostly physical course materials collection to digital and started a process to allow students to request course materials – this and other factors discussed later in the article potentially impacted the questions asked.

A Library Spaces Manager was hired in 2017 and helped create more consistency with signage and wayfinding for the building. They developed color coding signage for the main floor and better elevator and stairway directional signage throughout the building, all things to improve library wayfinding. Using handouts, social media, and print and digital signs to promote tutoring and study spaces around the building has perhaps contributed to better awareness of these and other services.

Methods: Assessing User Experiences & Themes

With ten years of concierge staff recordkeeping notes of questions asked at the concierge station, the first step was to consider what years of data to analyze. I decided to look at the most recent two years of the concierge service at the time of this writing: Fall 2023, Winter 2024, and Fall 2024 (there was no winter 2025 concierge offered). This included almost 1000 pieces of data before any initial review; by eliminating irrelevant data (e.g., "Can you make it stop raining?"), the total data points to analyze were 772.

Over the past ten years, we have developed a more structured method with categories to help in collecting questions asked. We still use paper for intake (often those staffing the desk do not even have a laptop) with date and time noted but have a list of the frequently asked topics for a quick check mark, only jotting down questions asked when they fall outside this range. These questions are put into a spreadsheet by a staff member at the end of each term. Reviewing the questions during the early years of the concierge service, we determined that offering a few key categories of the most frequently asked questions would save time for those staffing this service. Current categories or themes are: Printing, Computers/Tech, Library Directional, Campus Directional, Library Policies, and Course Reserves. Many of these are themes from the first data analysis of the concierge service, now allowing those staffing to simply mark a category without having to write the actual question. Staffers fill in an actual question or a few words of what was asked as needed if it does not fall into a listed category. Because of the current, more-structured intake, early analysis is happening on the spot as the people staffing the concierge service are determining where the question falls. Now, analyzing the current data from the concierge is a much simpler process.

For the initial concierge analysis described in the 2018 article, inductive analysis was used through a constant comparative method. This method (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Fram, S., 2015) involved an iterative process where research team members first identify themes individually and then discuss themes, in order to find consensus and then determine shared themes to apply across the data. Four main themes were derived from this process -- directional, technology, finding sources, and library policies -- with a total of seven total themes/subthemes. In 2025, I reviewed the last two years of concierge data, using a theoretical thematic approach. Since this study was a follow up to a previous one looking at the same service, I chose to apply the same themes from the last time, while analyzing the data. This deductive or top-down thematic approach allows for a quick yet more detailed analysis of some aspects of the data since they match the overall existing themes (Braun & Clarke, 2015). It was also a much smaller data set. As the researcher who analyzed the original data and now the current data, I am considered expert enough to tackle this analysis without a team. An undergraduate student employee did help give input on coding and grouping topics for items that fell outside of the set themes.

Using the initial research subthemes, which aligned closely to the concierge service current intake sheets, a student employee conducted a first pass using these seven original subthemes. For those not fitting, they created a couple new categories of their choosing including a miscellaneous one. Miscellaneous questions that did not seem relevant were eliminated from the coding. The original themes were: Directional (Library directions, locating library study spaces or tutoring, Campus directions); Technology (Library technology, Non-library technology); Finding Sources; Library policies (Library policies and supplies, Food and drink policy). Overall, the top four buckets of themes remain, though a few subthemes were shifted or eliminated.

The number of hours staffing the concierge desk has shifted over the years, streamlining to only the most critical hours to offer this service. In Fall 2015, the concierge service was staffed for 49 hours, whereas Fall 2023 was only 29 hours and Fall 2024 was 26 hours (winters 2016 and 2024 were the same at 9 hours staffed). In the first analysis of the concierge data showed on average, about 23 questions were asked per hour; in recent review about 17 questions per hour – slightly less, but overall, a high per hour number.

Results and Discussion

I categorized the data from 2024/2025 into the themes from the original study. Reviewing the 2015-2016 data with the recent analysis of data, the same themes are applied but with the newly added subthemes. Overall, the "non library technology" and "food and drink" had no questions asked in those areas in the current analysis, but course reserves/materials rose up.

Table 1

*Themes derived from questions asked by patrons at the concierge service station (Fall 2015/Winter 2016 terms, comparing to Fall 2023/Winter 2024 terms). * Indicates a new subtheme*

Theme (*subtheme*)	**Number of questions (% of all questions asked)**	
	2015/16	**2023/24**
Directional	**551 /40%**	**378 /49%**
Library directions	273 *(20%)*	322 *(42%)*
Locating library study spaces or tutoring	141 *(10%)*	24 *(3%)*
Campus directions	137 *(10%)*	32 *(4%)*
Technology	**422 /30%**	**235 /32%**
Library technology	318 *(23%)*	235*(32%)*
Non-library technology	94 *(7%)*	0 *(n/a)*
Finding Sources	**275 /20%**	**97 /13%**
*Course Materials **	59 *(21%)*	79 *(10%)*
*Finding Other Materials **	216 *(79%)*	18 *(3%)*
Library policies	**130 /10%**	**61 / 8%**
Library policies & supplies	82 */7%*	61 / *8%*
Food and drink policy	48 / *3%*	0 / *n/a*
Total number of questions	**1368**	**772**

Directional

Directional questions have remained at the heart of the concierge service. This is still the main reason people approach this concierge desk, with almost half of the questions asked being directional. The directional questions can easily be handled by any staff with simple maps and referral sheets. This saves time for both the user and the main desk staff. The user can ask a quick directional or referral question, not having to wait in a line or find their own way in a large overwhelming building. Mandel (2018) notes that getting directions was a frequently observed wayfinding behavior, with getting help directly from a staff member a second behavior observed. The concierge meets this need as the user's experience will be less anxious and more pleasant and the desk staff can spend more time with complex questions or transactional interactions.

In the early days of the concierge service, directional questions were also the most asked (40%). Currently, nearly 50% are directional questions, but interestingly the *library-specific* directional questions went from 20% to 42% of all questions asked, making this subcategory by far the majority of directional questions asked. Questions asked specifically about study spaces and tutoring have decreased from 10% to 3% and campus directions from 10% to 3% currently. Why the shift? Potential reasons could be the library's increase and expansion of its services promotion campuswide, along with the hiring of a library spaces manager to help with consistency and improve signage to help promote our services as well. Campus tours, which used to come into the library building during their tour, no longer happen, so a student's first time in the library might be that first week of term. Not having visited the library before arriving on campus for the first time further impacts new students' directional navigation and can cause more anxiety coming into a large library building. Tour guides also have changed their script. (J. Marquitt, personal communication, November 13, 2025). They are now sharing information on the Library of Things to borrow, course reserves, and tutoring services, which might explain why these are key questions asked now by students at the concierge When considering reasons for the decline in campus directional questions asked (down from 10% to 4% of questions asked), there is no clear explanation for this change and more research would need to be done to unpack why that question type has declined. Regardless, majority of questions asked at the concierge are primary directional or referrals for users, which was also indicated in the literature review.

Technology

The theme of technology remains at 30% of all questions as it did 10 years ago in the concierge data review. The major shift lies in the subthemes. In the last article, the theme of technology included library and non-library technology questions. This original data was from 2015- 2016, when the campus IT Service Desk was next to Library Circulation, sharing the same long desk, lending out equipment, and helping with technical support to OSU students. This IT Service pointed relocated across the quad to another building in 2017, and the desk service point was now only for library circulation. The result of this move is seen in the recent two academic year data review of fall 2023 and fall 2024 questions asked – almost all tech questions asked related to library technology. Students back in 2016 had been used to the walk-up service desk in the library, perhaps not even realizing they were separate entities at times and would be requesting technology the library did not have to lend. Now, years since that shift, and post COVID times, current students are not expecting campus IT in the library. At the same time, the library expanded its technology and grew a library of things offering much more tech tools than in the past. There are items now added to the library collection that were “non library tech” in the last iteration.

The previous thematic analysis did not indicate the need for a subtheme of printing, but now it is its own category on the concierge intake sheet. Printing questions come not only at the start but throughout the year, leading to the creation of a quick and easy desk handout about printing and a how-to poster near the printers. The concierge now captures “printing” as a stand-alone category as well. Review of the earlier data on printing shows that it was asked about the same back then (232 out of 318 = 73%) as it is now (184 out of 235 = 78%).

Finding Sources

The “finding sources” theme includes finding a known book/item (such as pleasure reading), resources for research, and course materials. Questions asked in this theme went down from 20% to 13% of total questions asked over the last decade. With easier access and better interfaces, students now do much of their searching and research online or through peers and not in the traditional or more formal librarian or instructor interactions (Qayyum, 2018). The searching students are often doing is for course materials (and sometime pleasure reading at the start of the term). The bookstore works closely with the library to help students find low or no cost materials and have shifted their display in the OSU Beaver Store bookstore. Current undergraduates experienced a major shift during COVID times, searching and discovering information and research materials on their own, and not in person. This research behavior is also most likely seen in the current data analysis compared to ten years ago though more research is needed to understand the story behind the numbers.

In the earlier review of the data, “course materials” was not drawn out into a subtheme of its own under the theme of Finding Sources. Course Reserves/Materials is now its own category on the concierge intake sheet, and this theme has grown to 81% of the Finding Sources theme (10 % of all questions asked). For this review “Course Materials” is now its own subtheme under Finding Sources theme. More questions asked related to course materials is potentially due to a few aspects: the growth of the library’s Course Reserves program in recent years (including preemptively buying unlimited-user license ebooks when available for any course materials listed that term); statewide mandates pushing for more low/no cost course materials as well as OSU’s Open Program messaging instructors campus wide; our non-profit bookstores catalog promotes to students alternative library course material; a shift in library policy to allow students to request their course materials directly; syllabus statements informing students to check with the library and other campus support services for course materials. These factors indicate we should see a rise in students asking about course materials compared to the analysis carried out ten years ago.

Library Policies

"Library Policies" includes questions about supplies, for example asking for envelopes or stickers. In the early review, library policies were 10% of all questions asked and had two subthemes: "policy and supplies" (7% of library policies) and specifically "food and drink policy" (3% of library policies). Now library policies dropped to 8% of all questions asked, with no "food and drink" questions. The main reason for this shift is the concierge intake sheet now has "Library Policies" as a theme to check mark - in the past it was not, and staff would need to write in the question asked. Some of the marks for library policies could be related to food or drink but there is no way to know. Hence for this analysis it is taken off as a subtheme.

Conclusion & Future Considerations

Questions users are asking at your library tell a story. Our story is about creating a welcoming environment every year as new students come to the university and enter the physical library. Users may be okay wayfinding on their own; they may only be asking a question because we happen to be standing there; they may discover what they need through other means, but we still find this service viable and useful. Offering a flexible concierge service as a quick approachable means to get help also provides a sense of belonging to users particularly new to the space. Directional questions are still the evergreen questions asked. Improvement in signage and promotion are helpful, but students still want to talk to actual people. The welcoming and convenient nature of this early-term concierge service is still a reason people approach to ask questions that they might be able to discover on their own. Reviewing sampling of ten years of a library concierge service data shows how viable, useful, and desirable a service like this still is.

The concierge service has helped shift our library culture to a more user-centered service model. We have taken the idea of a mobile station to various uses, such as asking quick questions of our users (called a Tiny Café) to gain insight into what they know and understand to better design our services. People working at the concierge desk over the years have seen the benefit of this station. When library staff work at the concierge desk, it helps them to practice this user centered approach and apply this lens to all the work they do. The current concierge service data review shows it is now mainly a welcoming place for directional questions and referrals as it is intended to be. A periodic check of data asked over time is always useful to uncover potential user experience issues. In general, the data analysis of the recent questions asked at the concierge are relatively the same from ten years ago, despite changes in space, policy, and services. And it continues to be a useful wayfinding and empathy-building tool for a better user experience in our library. At various intervals, we can take time to explore changes in the data to check how current users experience the library spaces and services through questions asked. Even without a change in the built environment nor with any policies changes, new students arrive every year on campus, making a concierge an easy to implement, user-focused flexible service any library could offer. Make it easy and friendly for the staff as well as the users.

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Peer-Reviewed Article

Radical Vulnerability: The Pedagogy of Real Talk for Authentic Librarian-Student Connection

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the implications, challenges, and impacts of the Pedagogy of Real Talk on the ability to foster connectedness in library instruction. Autoethnography is employed to position the author's experience as the subject of study, attempting to re-inset the importance of librarian experience in the enactment of inclusive pedagogy. Like the Pedagogy of Real Talk's support of instructor vulnerability in the classroom, this paper seeks to honor and analyze the author's experience as an early-career academic librarian. The autoethnography details the author's experience incorporating the Pedagogy of Real Talk in library instruction. Through critical self-reflection, this paper presents the author's reckoning with vulnerability and openness to foster connection between librarians and students. Library professionals are provided with an overview of the Pedagogy of Real Talk and are given insight into the implementation of a distinct inclusive teaching style for library instruction.

KEYWORDS

Inclusive pedagogy, autoethnography, library instruction, Pedagogy of Real Talk

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Introduction

I am a young, white, cis-woman and come from an American, working-class background. I have hypothyroidism, ADHD, and depression. I disclose these facets of my identity as they influence my interactions with the world and how others perceive me. Although some aspects of my identity afford me immense privilege, I still face challenges from sexism and ableism, particularly in my work as a librarian.

Early on in my career as a librarian, a professor introduced himself and expressed his enthusiasm for my hire. Although he was genuine, he was more enthusiastic that I was a young woman like the librarian before me, and thereby could enact the same "bubbly," exciting personality. Being told this was a truly odd thing. Yet, this expectation felt like a mask I had to wear to successfully engage students and even professors.

This imposed persona was like wearing a stereotypical librarian costume and creating connection with students was difficult. A student once told me that it must be nice to sit in my office all day and listen to music. I was shocked at the assumption and wondered where this misperception stemmed from. This divide appeared anytime I taught a one-shot session or had a reference interaction. There persisted a misconception about me as a librarian. It was increasingly difficult to teach critically when I was stuck worrying about how to negotiate librarian stereotypes and bound to strict time limits in the one-shot.

Librarians are estranged from students and separated from class learning. Building connectedness and belonging in the classroom is necessary to support students' critical exploration and reflection, but the transactional nature of higher education limits instructors' ability to enact critical pedagogies, which encourage students to critically analyze social structures and power dynamics. Library instruction often takes the form of the one-shot session, which makes this educational transaction especially true (Nataraj & Siqueiros, 2022; Kingsland, 2020). More importantly, it makes connection with students difficult.

We all struggle in, as psychologist Judith V. Jordan writes, a "traumatized and traumatizing society" (2004, p. 42). It became increasingly difficult to keep up the friendly, happy librarian façade without it leading to burn out. The precarious balance to seem warm, helpful, and caring while also maintaining a sense of professionalism, neutrality, and competence was exhausting (Pagowsky & DeFrain, 2014). I began to question whether librarianship was a good "fit" for me. How could I be a supportive librarian when I needed support myself?

However, the problem was not entirely due to stereotypes. I was not able to be my authentic self nor was I able to build deeper connections through my teaching because I was terrified of being vulnerable. I was only able to situate authenticity in the library classroom through growth and direction, which was made possible through joining a Faculty Academy for

Inclusive Pedagogy. This opportunity had a lasting impact on my perception of vulnerable library instruction and my role as a librarian. The Faculty Academy taught me the Pedagogy of Real Talk (PRT), a newer pedagogical approach that highlights the essentiality of vulnerability in fostering connection in the classroom for enhanced student learning. From this experience, I have begun the arduous task of evaluating my own authenticity within the library classroom and beyond.

I will employ autoethnography, the study of one's experience, in this paper to give personal context to existing scholarship on librarianship and vulnerability. This methodology, like PRT, requires radical vulnerability. In this self-reflexive study, I investigate how PRT influenced my perception of my role as an authentic librarian and how I perceive the challenges associated with connecting to students and beyond. Librarians can utilize PRT in library instruction to foster deeper connections with students. Beyond the documented benefits of PRT for student belonging (Keyser et al., 2022), this pedagogy can impact the instructor's experience of belonging in the classroom and connectedness to students. Specifically, by embracing vulnerability, librarians can subvert the transactional nature of library interactions to build authentic relationships with students.

Literature Review

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that centers the writer's lived experience within the social context they are studying, offering insight into complex questions that quantitative research methods struggle to explore in detail (Adams et al., 2014; Poulos, 2021). This person-centered research approach aligns with my understanding of PRT as a person-centered pedagogy.

Autoethnography is a relatively new research method in librarianship, yet the scholarship on using autoethnography in library and information scholarship provides thought-provoking narratives about librarians' experiences (Deitering & Schroeder, 2017; Fourie, 2021). These examples of autoethnography in librarianship empowered me to consider and analyze my own struggles with connecting to students and implementing PRT. Autoethnography requires the researcher to be vulnerable and share their experiences. PRT asks the same of the instructor.

The Pedagogy of Real Talk

At my institution, I participated in a paid three-year Faculty Academy on Inclusive Pedagogy, which introduced participants to PRT. As part of the inaugural cohort of 13 faculty, I learned directly from Paul Hernandez, PRT's creator. Building on critical pedagogies including the work of Paulo Freire and bell hooks, PRT serves as a guide for instructors bringing personal experience, vulnerability, and connection into their classrooms (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994).

Two important facets of PRT are the “real talk” and the “alternative lesson,” which serve to support student connectedness and a sense of belonging. These techniques connect students to the curriculum, each other, and the instructor. Real talk requires instructors to share a personal story with the class and then prompt students to share their own experiences to establish connection, caring, trust, and understanding (Hernandez, 2022). The alternative lesson incorporates students’ experiences, interests, and worldviews in an engaging activity to orient students to content or achieve a learning objective. This allows instructors to teach in a way that is relevant to students' lives. Both the real talk and alternative lesson allow students and instructor to engage with each other and the course content on a personal level.

During the first workshop, Hernandez modeled these techniques, sharing personal stories that moved me. His authenticity inspired me to reconsider my own teaching. I realized that if I wanted my experience of teaching and librarianship to change from one of monotony and disconnect, I had to do something I was uncomfortable with to coexist as librarian, teacher, and person.

Initially, I doubted PRT’s applicability to library instruction. There wasn’t enough time and there were more important things to do in that time besides share experiences toward the goal of “connectedness.” But I recognized its alignment with much of the student-centered, feminist work librarians are already bringing into their classrooms. PRT offers a chance to create connections with students that feel genuine rather than pro forma. Its purpose is to strengthen a sense of belonging to enable an effective, inclusive learning environment. I began the task of adapting PRT to library instruction, creating small, easy real talks and focusing more on the attitudes about teaching it presents.

Critical Pedagogies in Library Instruction

The critical aspects of PRT are not novel in library instruction. Maria Accardi in, *Feminist Pedagogy for Library Instruction,* encourages librarians to develop lessons with students’ lived experiences in mind, including students’ directly in knowledge creation and destabilizing teacher-student power dynamics to include students as teachers themselves much like how PRT uses the alternative lesson (2013). The crux of feminist library pedagogy is to design a space where all voices are valued in a constructive discussion, including student knowledge and experience into the lesson (Accardi, 2013). Feminist pedagogy requires the classroom to be a site of collaborative learning, open dialogue, and inclusion. It encourages teachers and instructors to see students as whole people, in the context of society and socio-cultural backgrounds. This approach values student voices, experiences, and knowledge. PRT is a practical application of this ethos.

PRT is meaningful in the library classroom because it fosters student-librarian connections beyond the typical brief interactions in an instructional one-shot session. PRT builds upon feminist and critical pedagogy, centering student experience and decentering teacher-as-authority. Incorporating discussion-based, student-led learning, it aligns itself to the feminist library pedagogy many library classes already employ. What is unique about PRT is the "real talk," especially in the library instruction classroom. Real talk positions the librarian instructor in a place of open vulnerability further emphasizing the anti-hierarchical nature of the classroom. Instead of simply directing student discussion, the librarian is an active participant in that dialogue. This also serves to encourage students to share their experiences and thoughts since the librarian instructor is demonstrating vulnerability and bravery, which is expected of students in feminist classrooms.

The Importance of Libraries and Student-Librarian Connection

Academic libraries continue to be an invaluable contributor to student academic achievement. Library usage has been linked to higher GPAs and greater retention (Allison, 2015, Emmons & Wilkinson, 2011; Mezick, 2015; Soria et al., 2013; Crawford, 2015). However, library anxiety and student reluctance to seek out academic librarians is a barrier to students' library use (Lund & Walston, 2020; Carlile, 2007). If students feel overwhelmed or apprehensive about seeking librarian assistance, they do not initiate conversations or interactions with librarians.

Students may feel reluctant to approach the library and librarians for various reasons, but librarian visibility and approachability play large roles in student-librarian interactions. The perception of librarian approachability has a significant influence on the willingness of students to interact with a librarian (Van Kampen-Breit and Cooke, 2015). Instead of going to librarians for help, students will ask professors and friends, presumably those they have a connection to and feel more comfortable approaching for help (Miller & Murillo, 2012; Robinson & Reid, 2007; Vondracek, 2007). It is imperative that librarians foster relationships with students to continue providing services that support student success.

Students feel more comfortable reaching out to librarians for assistance when they have had a librarian-initiated interaction, such as a library instruction session (Bennedbaek et al., 2021). Connections built from these interactions with librarians eased library anxieties and encouraged students to reach out to librarians on their own (LeMire et al, 2021; Dalal et al., 2022). Students who were at least exposed to a librarian through a librarian-initiated interaction were more likely to seek help from a librarian on their own, taking the initiative to interact with librarians themselves (Dalal et al, 2022). When students do interact with an academic librarian, they are more likely to use library resources and feel confident in their ability to use them (Dalal et al., 2022; Bennedbaek et al., 2021). Authentic connections between students and librarians are essential to maintain the centrality of the library in student education and to successfully support student achievement. Often the only time students meet with a librarian is in a library instruction session. PRT can be leveraged in library instruction sessions to create room for further connection and interaction.

Doing Real Talk

During my time in the PRT faculty cohort, I questioned how I might incorporate PRT in a one-shot instruction session. At its core, PRT fosters authentic interaction, inclusivity, and connection. Connection and openness in general are difficult. I often wonder: is being vulnerable and sharing experiences difficult only for me? Or is this a challenge many librarians face?

PRT asks instructors to share a personal story that revolves around a universal theme like perseverance, belonging, sadness, etc. and invite students to do the same. While many of my more experienced colleagues in the workshop were able to tell personal and poignant stories, this was a difficult endeavor for me. I was afraid of "getting it wrong."

> *In kindergarten, as we learned to write our letters, my teacher called on me to answer, "Where do you begin when writing the letter 'O'?" I was shy. Being called on to answer a question at that age was more terrifying than the thought of parasitic aliens bursting out of my chest (my parents let me watch PG-13 movies as a kid). Caught off guard and panicking, I stayed quiet. If I didn't move, she couldn't see me, right? My teacher told me that if I got the question wrong, she would cry. Now the stakes were high. I remember my answer to this day. "You start on the top." Apparently not. She pantomimed being completely heartbroken. The other kindergarteners in my class all turned and laughed at me. Now as the student with "the wrong answer," I became an obvious target for ridicule. I still remember the "correct" answer. Start on the right side of the "O."*

The teacher's question and insensitive response to my answer still pops into my head from time to time. In hindsight, this experience colored much of my early education. I tried not to stand out or even talk in class after that day. To this day, I still fear speaking up. I fear being wrong. I fear the inevitable moment when everyone realizes I'm an imposter. This experience directly informs my understanding of student apprehension. Sharing a story or even a comment is daunting. However, students are more open to speaking or sharing when they hear this story.

It takes no small amount of bravery to share honestly. It is easier and more comfortable to ask students to share their experiences, their feelings, their thoughts while withholding your own. The intentional nature of crafting a story to share was difficult. My stories either felt too personal to share in a class I may be visiting only once or not vulnerably authentic enough. I also felt obligated to make my story relevant to the one-shot and not something that feels like it came out of nowhere. For PRT in the library one-shot to be successful, I had to reckon with my growing frustration and fears. I had to stop being an "all-or-nothing" perfectionist. Learning is a vulnerable state, and I learned the hard lesson that vulnerability, while important, is difficult to do.

To adapt PRT into one-shot sessions, which is no easy feat, I focused on making the real talk small anecdotal introductions or asides. I became a better model of courage and vulnerability to students. I don't ask students to share their experiences because of the constraints of the one-shot and the understanding that the classroom may not feel like a safe space to share for certain students. Yet, when I shared a small anecdote or story, I found that students were more engaged. Over time, I tried different stories about academic struggles, personal setbacks, or moments of persistence. I would note how students reacted and reflect on how I felt sharing with the class.

Not every attempt worked, I still struggle with rejection sensitivity and the fear of seeming weird for sharing a story in a one-shot. Sometimes PRT and telling a story takes a backburner role, but being my authentic self does not. I still don't go as "deep" as full PRT calls for, but a little self-disclosure is better than pretending to be a librarian stock character. Luckily, I teach a five-week course where I am able to build a more robust connection with students. I found the longer courses are where PRT flourishes, but it still helped quickly build rapport in my five-week class.

Over the course of the three years, I taught numerous one-shots and six sessions of a mini-course on information literacy in which I introduced myself using real talks. At the beginning of class, I take a few moments to introduce myself, who I am, and what I do. Each class is different and so the things I share vary. Sometimes I talk about my research interests, how I started doing academic research as an undergraduate, my experiences with the scholarly publishing process, and how I sometimes struggle with the assumptions people make about me as a librarian. One real talk I gave to an introductory women's and gender studies class went something like this:

> *"I read your syllabus and was excited that this class is interrogating topics like gender inequality and sexism," I said facing students, the majority of whom are women. "This topic is relevant to all of us. As a woman, I negotiate gendered assumptions in my personal life and in my career as a librarian. People ask me if I'm married, if I have kids, and they expect me to want those things. When I expressed my desire to go to graduate school, a lot of people from my life tried to dissuade me. They couldn't understand why I wanted to continue my education. As an academic librarian, I'm able to learn and publish my research, but many people don't know that I have faculty status or that I do more than answer questions at the reference desk. Librarianship is portrayed as a feminine profession and librarians are stuck with archetypal feminine characterizations. Because feminized professions, especially ones*

that involve caring and public service, are undervalued by the patriarchal, capitalist structure, the valuable work we do goes unnoticed. Today, I'm going to demonstrate how to come up with a research topic and use the library databases. I'm going to use the topic of emotional labor and women as a starting point because it interests me, and I have personal experience with this topic."

It can be daunting for students to share their thoughts or questions in a classroom and even more so in a one-shot with an instructor they are meeting for the first time. When I asked students to share their research questions or topics for our class demonstration of a database, I had students raise their hands. That is a noticeable change from the usually silent classroom I encounter during one-shots. One student's topic was gender inequality in the workplace. We discussed how we can focus this topic into a specific research question, using the experiences of students and me as an instructor to explore possible directions for research. We discussed the gender pay-gap in sports, gender disparity in administration and management roles in librarianship, and workplace harassment. The class became much more than a database demonstration. We connected research and real-world issues in a short amount of time.

Another real talk I shared had a dual purpose. I could either frame it as knowing when to use the right tools or knowing when to ask for help.

> *One summer, when I was a child, my parents and I went camping, as we often did. It was a hot evening and so we decided to grab some ice cream from the campground store. My parents walked along side me while I rode my bike, zigzagging around them. Being the kid that I was, I pedaled as fast as I could to my destination. Eventually I arrived at the store before them. The realization that I'd lost my parents startled me into circling back around to our campsite. It was getting dark and still no sign of my parents. Alone at the campsite, I began to panic. I was hungry, the sun was going down, and I was locked out of our camper. I wanted to get in the camper so I could wait for my parents in, what I deemed, safety. Hey, I was a kid prone to panic, okay? So, I looked around me to see if I could open the camper door without the keys. I saw stones and twigs. What should I have done?*

This is where I usually pause and ask students to answer or give me their ideas about how this story was going to end.

> *Well, I decided I could probably use a stick to pick the lock. (Locksmiths, I'm sorry). It did not go as planned. The stick got stuck in the lock, thereby jamming it so now not even a key would be able to open it. Just as I was finished with my failed experiment, my parents arrived back at the campsite. I was in so much trouble.*

Finally, a personal favorite of mine is about needing help and receiving too much help (in a way). This is a real talk I give my students in the 1-credit, five-week course I teach.

> *In fourth grade, I was tasked with writing an essay. I had no idea how to do that. I can't even remember if we learned what an essay was. So, like any kid, I go to my parents for help. Except their idea of help was to do the entire project for me. My dad got really into the topic for the paper and ended up writing a 15-page essay for, remember, a fourth grader's assignment. I still do not know how I ended up getting an A on that assignment when I obviously did not write it. It wasn't until years later when I finally understood how to write an essay.*
>
> *I tell you this story because I know many of you use ChatGPT or another AI tool for different tasks. Sometimes we are cognitively offloading that task to AI, meaning that we lose important cognitive skills when we don't do a thing and instead have someone else, or in this case, AI do it. When we repeatedly offload tasks to AI, we are eroding our ability to do it ourselves.*

I'll admit these anecdotes aren't very deep, and maybe they shouldn't be for a one-shot instruction session. However, they are true stories about myself, and they did take a brave moment of vulnerability to disclose. Even sharing a little about myself had an impact on student engagement. Normally, I'm met with silence in the one-shot classroom and watch as students look at their phones or laptops. While I wasn't expecting my disclosure to have an enormous impact, or any observable impact at all, I was happily surprised at the results. I saw most students in the class making eye-contact with me! I felt more present in the classroom as facilitator and fellow learner. I also noted the increased number of students that participated in class. Students asked questions about content and even about my job, shared their experiences, sent me follow-up emails, and wanted one-on-one consultations. I could feel that they were interested in what I was saying. I wasn't some stranger to them anymore.

Shifting Mindset

Our attitudes toward one-shots can be a barrier to engaging authentically with students. I was hesitant to "waste" time in a one-shot by talking about myself, which seemed self-indulgent and not student-centered, but I needed to change my perception of the purpose of a one-shot (Douglas & Gadsby, 2022; Nataraj & Siqueiros, 2022). Empathy and vulnerability do have a place in librarianship and in a one-shot (Beuoy, 2020). By implementing real talk, I started to feel less like I was providing a service and more like a person with valuable expertise to share.

I felt and observed the change in the librarian-student dynamic in the one-shot. Students were alert, looking at me and my teaching materials as I spoke instead of hiding their faces.

Students would answer when I asked questions of the class, tell me what confused them, ask their own questions, and seek my guidance. As I got better with PRT and my real talks expanded, I received more follow-up questions from students, emails, and one-on-one consultations.

The library is an essential resource for students, situating librarians in a unique position to offer empathetic connections to students outside of professor/student dynamics. Without human connection we feel alone, isolated, and lack self-identification. When we are disconnected, we are unable to grow and change (Jordan, 2004). I felt this stagnation in my own experience. I saw it in myself and in students. I couldn't connect because I wasn't ready to be vulnerable with students, and yet I expected students to be vulnerable by asking for help and sharing their thoughts (Douglas, 2018). This hypocritical expectation was an obstacle to fostering an inclusive, connected classroom. Connected classrooms mean both the instructor and the students are open to transformation through vulnerability in the learning process.

The foundation of PRT's ideology is radical empathy and vulnerability. Jordan and Schwartz (2018) position vulnerability as a powerful pedagogical tool. We discuss empathetic teachers and empathy in classrooms, but we often forget how to do empathy correctly. Jordan and Schwartz write, "radical empathy involves radical acceptance of vulnerability" (2018, p. 28). I'm not suggesting unfettered confessionals, but the acceptance of vulnerability by sharing our stories, thoughts, and feelings as a possible way to connect. When instructors are vulnerable with a class or a student, we actively alter the power dynamic and create a collaborative interaction where everyone can experience growth. As one-shots remain a primary method of library instruction, remember that the quality of time we spend with students is always important.

Limitations and Implications

This autoethnography is an exploration of my own experience with PRT, meaning I cannot speak to how students are impacted by this approach beyond what I've observed in classrooms. In the future, I hope to gather students' responses to PRT in library one-shots. A perception survey with Likert scales, such as the one created by Keyser et al. (2022), with the addition of a written reflection may be beneficial to collecting data on students' experience of PRT. Another avenue is to assess student achievement of learning outcomes in library classes that use PRT. Librarians can build this type of assessment into active learning techniques like in-class worksheet or activity, to measure whether students engage more with the content when librarians use real talks. Ultimately, more research is needed to explore future methods to assess students' experiences of PRT in library instruction and how it affects their learning.

Moving Forward

Inclusive pedagogy is more than incorporating social justice themes into a lesson. It is vulnerability and self-reflexivity in the classroom. If the instructor embodies openness and willingness to learn, it can result in the transformation of both students and teacher.

The Pedagogy of Real Talk requires commitment to being vulnerable and becoming your authentic self in the classroom. It took time and practice before I felt comfortable sharing stories in the classroom, and it took no small amount of courage to try. I was fortunate to have a group of colleagues to share failures and triumphs with. Doing PRT is not easy as my fellow cohort colleagues and I found out. PRT is a teaching method that best aligns with semester-long or year-long classes. However, the tenants of PRT, like the real talk, are still useful for instruction librarians teaching one-shots to introduce ourselves on a relational level.

What we do is not “invisible,” it is essential to the vitality of the institution. Ultimately, the success of inclusive pedagogy hinges on our willingness to delve into the relational facets of learning, acknowledging that genuine connection is as vital as content delivery. PRT can position librarians in a more visible, comprehensive role as part of student education. Although the one-shot has an obvious time limit, the quality of the time we spend with students is much more important than stuffing all our knowledge into a 50-minute session. Vulnerability and a demonstrated willingness to connect with students on a personal and professional level has an influence on students' attention and willingness to reach out. One positive interaction with a librarian is enough to impact students. I was amazed how sharing a small vulnerable story about myself caused students to focus on me rather than on the screen behind me or on their computers. Inclusive pedagogy isn’t just for students, it is for us as well. A classroom is not an inclusive classroom if we forget to include ourselves.

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Peer-Reviewed Article

Collection Development as Anti-Racism: An Exploratory Analysis of Anti-Racist Statements on ARL Library Websites

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ABSTRACT

Social justice issues have received increasing attention in academic libraries in recent decades, and from 2020 were prominent in the messaging of institutions that published anti-racist statements on their websites. Using a content analysis approach, this study explores a sample of these texts from the websites of Association of Research Library (ARL) member libraries to investigate how they envision collection development as a facet of anti-racism. Statements were found to be largely lacking in practical detail, indicating a lack of deep engagement with the issue of racism in collection development practice. The majority of statements invoked "racism" in abstract terms, without explicitly connecting it to specific racialized groups, and focused on diversification of collections as the primary method for countering racial injustice. Smaller numbers of statements named specific social groups and committed to scrutinizing practices that may contribute to the continued "whiteness" of their collections; these show better alignment with emerging scholarship in this area and greater promise of efficacy.

KEYWORDS

Anti-racism, diversity, academic libraries, collection development

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Introduction

In the summer of 2020, the highly publicized murder of George Floyd, and ensuing demonstrations protesting police brutality, triggered an outpouring of public declarations by representatives of academic institutions voicing opposition to racism in U.S. society (Meikle & Morris, 2022; Sotto-Santiago et al., 2021). Academic libraries were among the organizations that responded in this way to a perceived need to speak out about yet another lethal deployment of institutional force, with little regard for accountability, against a person of color. The statements that were published on library websites generally carried a tone of urgency and detailed specific actions that would be taken to address the problem of racism, as manifested both in the activities of librarians and through the contribution of libraries to the broader educational mission of academia. This research examines how collection development concerns figured in a sample of those statements, with the aim of better understanding how this area of library practice is considered by librarians to be implicated in efforts to address or counter the social forces of injustice in general, and racism in particular.

While the texts in question were obviously less thoroughly elaborated than strategic planning or policy documents resulting from extensive organizational effort, it can be assumed that they were intended to convey the most important facets of a library's plans for anti-racist work. Since collections are normally considered to be a central pillar of academic library services, it is interesting to investigate whether the writers of these statements saw their collection development programs as advancing the aims of anti-racism and social justice, and if so, in what ways – especially in light of survey results from the fall of 2020 indicating that less than 20% of U.S. academic library directors considered their libraries to have well-developed anti-racist strategies addressing collections (Frederick & Wolff-Eisenberg, 2021). Further, considering that official pronouncements by academic libraries on the related topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have been noted to be frequently vague and disengaged from the institution's local context (Devarenne et al., 2024; Hudson, 2017; Macaulay, 2023), the question arises whether anti-racist statements show a similar tendency to abstractness, or instead engage more specifically with the various ways that racism might be manifested, and countered, through library work within a given community – potentially indicating a more or less robust approach to addressing this problem.

Specifically, this research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Do statements addressing academic libraries' commitment to anti-racism include collection development as a salient area of activity?
2. Do the themes of the academic library statements linking collection development and anti-racism name specific social groups as being concerned or affected by these collection development activities, or do they present "anti-racism" and related concepts as reified ends in themselves?

3. What aspects of collection development are commonly identified in these statements as contributing to attainment of the anti-racist aims of academic libraries?

Ultimately, this research helps throw additional light on how academic library collections have been viewed as affecting the broader social world, as part of the enterprise of higher education. At the time of writing, it also bears witness to a cultural moment that, in the United States, may soon be overtaken by political pressures discouraging public attention to questions of racism and social injustice.

Background and Literature Review

Guiding Documents of the American Library Association

Racism, here taken very generally to mean discrimination against people based on their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, has not often been directly addressed in the library literature until relatively recently. While there has been general recognition that the presence of distinct social groups within the communities served by libraries requires attention in terms of appropriate services (including collections), the specifics of racial relations have usually been elided (Honma, 2005). This is well illustrated in various statements of principle formulated by the American Library Association (ALA) over the years, which professional librarians in the United States have long consulted for guidance in thinking about how library collections and services should relate inclusively to their communities.

With regard to library collection development specifically, the ALA's Library Bill of Rights begins with the assertion that library resources should be provided for "all people of the community the library serves" (American Library Association [ALA], 2019a, Article I), and should not exclude materials on the basis of authors' origin, background, or viewpoint; it also states that libraries should provide materials reflecting "all points of view" (Article II). In terms of both service to a community of users, and development of a library collection representing global knowledge, the guiding principle expressed in these documents is absence of discrimination of any sort – without reference to the societal tendencies that might otherwise result in such bias.

In recent years, statements such as the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) Diversity Standards (2012) and the ALA's interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights with regard to "Diverse Collections" (2019a) have drawn on contemporary understandings of socio-cultural diversity in providing guidance on building a library collection that fits the requirements of the entirety of the community:

> A diverse collection should contain content by and about a wide array of people and cultures to authentically reflect a variety of ideas, information, stories, and experiences.... Library workers have an obligation to select, maintain, and support access to content on subjects by diverse authors and creators that meets – as closely as possible

> – the needs, interests, and abilities of all the people the library serves. (ALA, 2019a, para. 1)

The "Diverse Collections" guidance goes on to mention "content created by and representative of marginalized and underrepresented groups" as a necessary component of such a collection (ALA, 2019a, para. 4). The Interpretation of ACRL Diversity Standard 4 on "Development of collections, programs, and services" goes further in specifically calling for "consideration of the needs of historically oppressed, underrepresented, and underserved groups" (2012), going beyond simple representation of different groups in a diverse collection by introducing attention to the effects of inequitable relations of power.

The concept of diversity invoked in these documents acknowledges significant differences between "peoples and cultures" but does not link these differences to historical factors producing overrepresentation of particular groups; reference to historical marginalization (and related concepts), on the other hand, recognizes that relations of power have resulted in oppression, underrepresentation, and lack of service to some on the basis of group identity. From this perspective, racism can be classified as a special type of social marginalization, and is in fact treated as such in the current ALA Policy Manual (ALA, 2010): this includes a section entitled "Combatting Racism," stating that "institutionalized inequities based on race are embedded into our society and are reinforced through social institutions and further perpetuated by policies, practices, behaviors, traditions, and structures," and that libraries "must seek to provide an environment free of racism, where all are treated with respect and dignity" (Section B.3.2). However, no further elaboration is provided as to how this might be achieved.

Race and Diversity in Academic Libraries and their Collections

Discussion of how library service provision and collection development could be tailored for specific socio-cultural groups, including those defined racially, was sporadic until the 1990s[1]. Early research in this domain largely concerned itself with the practical implications of serving a multicultural population (for example, Wertheimer, 1980). References to race or ethnicity as a salient factor in academic collection development, correspondingly, were most frequently encountered in discussions of collections work in institutions with a substantial number of students identified with minorities, such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Segal, 1987), or universities with a large Mexican American student population (Haro, 1972).

In the 1990s, the terminology of "diversity" began to be more frequently used in describing communities of academic library users that included significant populations of historically underrepresented and underserved ethnic or racial groups: both Trujillo & Weber

[1] A couple of articles assessing the state of library services to African Americans published during the Jim Crow era (Gleason, 1945; Shore, 1932) are now of primarily historical interest.

(1991) and Chadley (1992) discussed the issue of “cultural diversity” in academic libraries in terms of the special predicament of “African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and American Indians” (Chadley, 1992, p. 206). Johnson-Cooper focused on racial diversity in presenting practical recommendations for building a multiracial collection in an academic library from an “Afrocentric” perspective, arguing that the “information needs of a racially diverse population of users demand a racially diverse collection” (Johnson-Cooper, 1994, p. 158). As attention to the concept of diversity as a consideration in academic library collection development intensified over the 1990s, racial groups typically figured as constituents of a multifaceted, heterogeneous society whose needs were to be considered, alongside others, in building appropriately diverse collections reflective of that society (Delaney-Lehman, 1996; Pettingill & Morgan, 1996; Vega García, 2000). At the same time, diversity in itself was treated as a quality to be cultivated in order to achieve the goal of a universally beneficial “pluralism” in education. As Johnson-Cooper puts it: “Diversity can be the bridge which will allow us as a society to make the transition from mere numerical diversity to interactive pluralism wherein all racial groups can engage their differences in a process of mutual enrichment” (1994, p. 154).

Over ensuing decades, the purview of diversity concerns related to library collections expanded to commonly include gender and sexuality (Ciszek, 2011; Proctor, 2020) in addition to race, ethnicity, and culture; other attributes of identity that were often mentioned in conversations about diversity in other contexts, such as religion, physical ability, neurological disposition, age, socio-economic class, and veteran status (Jones, 2005), do not appear to have figured significantly in discussions of library collections. From the mid-1990s, broader institutional initiatives aimed at promoting generalized “diversity, equity, and inclusion” (DEI) at universities and colleges became more prevalent (Ciszek, 2020), providing encouragement for diversification efforts within academic libraries that frequently included a collection development component alongside attention to library staffing and services (Buttlar, 1994; Semenza et al., 2017). Numerous case studies have been published since the mid-1990s describing projects in academic libraries to assess and improve collection diversity both generally (Delaney-Lehman, 1996; Kristick, 2020; Pettingill & Morgan, 1996), and with respect to specific groups such as locally prominent ethnicities or nationalities (Schomberg & Grace, 2005) and the LGBTQ community (Proctor, 2020).

Social Justice, Anti-Racism, and the Critique of Diversity

While earlier discussions of diversity in academic libraries largely took the marginalization of social minorities as a given that could be effectively addressed by increasing their representation in the ranks of library personnel and in collections – that is, through “inclusion,” – the past two decades have seen increasing attention to the social forces producing continued homogeneity and exclusion of marginalized groups (Ciszek, 2020) – in effect, foregrounding the “equity” component of the DEI concept. Social justice concerns, including anti-racism, began to be more frequently articulated as a critique of structural inequities perpetuated through practices at the institutional level, with a persistence beyond the intentions and behavior of individuals, and requiring more than a superficial increase in overall representational diversity as a solution (Hudson, 2017; Morales et al., 2014). Peterson (1996) offered an early criticism of how celebratory invocations of "multiculturalism" in library literature "obscure[d] equity issues" (p. 172) specifically with respect to race in the U.S., while the study of race and racism was marginalized and not accepted as serious scholarship by the profession. This theme was elaborated at length by Honma (2005) who echoed Espinal (2001) in adding an analysis of the unacknowledged "whiteness" of the Library and Information Sciences (LIS) field and of libraries in general, describing them as having "historically served the interests of a white racial project by aiding in the construction and maintenance of a white American citizenry as well as the perpetuation of white privilege in the structures of the field itself" (p. 4). The theme of a library milieu that privileges perspectives and behaviors associated with an implicitly racialized mainstream ideal, while marginalizing non-mainstream "others," was subsequently taken up by a number of authors who elaborated theoretical frameworks for conceptualizing anti-racism in U.S. academic libraries as a response to the dominant culture of whiteness (Brook et al., 2015; Espinal et al., 2018; Leung & López-McKnight, 2021).

In the realm of academic library collection development, reframing the problem of homogeneous collections as the product of pervasive power imbalances did not necessarily diminish librarians' focus on including more materials by and about marginalized people: this has remained the most commonly articulated goal of projects to counter collection whiteness (England, 2023; Inefuku, 2021; Price 2022). However, diversification was situated as part of wider efforts to analyze and modify the institutional practices contributing to the marginalization of non-white racial groups within the record of knowledge maintained by libraries. Warner (2001) identified factors reinforcing collection whiteness that continued to be salient, decades later: bias in the scholarly publishing industry resulting in fewer works published by non-white authors, lack of coverage of these publications by reviewers and approval plans, selector bias disfavoring non-traditional publications, and reluctance to budget time and money to support pursuing materials outside of the academic mainstream, are all themes echoed variously by England (2023), Inefuku (2021), Morales et al. (2014), and Price (2022) in their discussions of barriers to collection diversification in the service of social justice. Discussing collection diversity more broadly, Jahnke et al. (2022) reviewed additional structural barriers including metadata or indexing bias that complicates the task of identifying materials relevant to a collections diversifications project, rigid classification schemes that inadequately represent changing disciplinary profiles and emerging interdisciplinary fields, and overdependence on usage statistics or user demand to guide collections-related decisions, potentially resulting in exclusion of non-mainstream publications that attract relatively modest use.

The Practice of Anti-Racist Collection Development

The critique of the whiteness of academic libraries and their collections, alongside dissatisfaction with frequently vague and superficial treatments of "diversity" at the institutional level (Devarenne et al., 2024; Hudson, 2017; Macaulay, 2023), has prompted an emerging literature concerned with the practicalities of collection development work grounded in social justice principles in general and anti-racism in particular. While building on previous conceptualizations of collections diversity, the approaches documented in these studies acknowledge the argument of Jahnke et al. that "diversity as it relates to library collections is an ongoing pursuit that requires critical engagement with developing areas of scholarship, emerging social justice issues, and critique and re-evaluation of methods" (2022, p. 166).

Koob et al. (2023) described how their project group shelved a contemplated plan to audit their library's existing collection for diversity – a methodologically fraught and ultimately unnecessary step in their view, considering the array of factors contributing to its whiteness and the overwhelming testimony of non-white colleagues and users, – and instead developed an approach to assist librarians in proactively questioning their selection decisions, in terms of how these might continue to exclude materials that diverge from the racialized mainstream. Their solution took the form of a workbook reviewing the concepts associated with whiteness in library collections and posing questions to prompt collection managers to consider diversity in a number of areas including scholarly publishing venues and publishers as well as authors, subject matter, and intended audience; issues with basing acquisition and weeding decisions solely on usage data were also addressed. Additionally, Koob et al. foregrounded the need to engage with the "multicultural community" in identifying appropriate materials for addition to the collection, and to appropriately value and reward the contributions of non-white librarians working in this area. The importance of community engagement in the collection diversification process had earlier been emphasized by Blume and Roylance (2020) in their discussion of a collection "decolonization" project undertaken "from a place of respect", where the input of librarians and scholars of Pacific Islander background was sought to "co-create" an area studies collection for the Pacific Islands at the University of Utah.

Mullaly et al. (2023) added the term "justice" to the familiar triumvirate of equity, diversity and inclusion in their chapter providing guidance on "JEDI acquisitions and collections" in small and medium-sized academic libraries. Their recommendations for collection development intended to "decenter Whiteness [sic] and actively work toward equity, inclusion, and accessibility through a diversity of voices, subjects, publishers, and vendors" (p. 105), stressed the need for careful, consultative planning in developing an approach that is sustainable over the long term. Along with selection and acquisition practices that largely correspond to those discussed above, they recommended creation of an action plan including a clear definition of the specific collection areas targeted for diversification, assessment measures, areas of responsibility, budget, and timeline; they also highlighted the benefits of increasing participation both within the library and externally, for example through involvement of student groups and other campus units such as diversity offices. Devarenne et al. (2024) adopted a social justice orientation in their discussion of best practices for integration of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) themes in academic library collection development policies, emphasizing that these should include "dismantling structures of oppression" (including racism) and "rejecting neutrality", along with an acknowledgement of how the routine processes of collection development can pose barriers to diversification. They also noted that the effectiveness of EDI commitments in library policies is often vitiated by employment of vague or unclear language. To avoid this, they recommended developing a clear and specific definition of what collections diversity involves for the library, setting concrete goals for collection development efforts in this area, and "embedding" EDI collections work firmly in the local context through outreach efforts with stakeholder communities: "By centering user needs throughout all stages of planning, implementation, and assessment, libraries can more effectively surface institution-specific collection problems and identify impactful approaches for addressing them" (p. 5).

Anti-Racist Statements from Academic Libraries

Few studies have been published analyzing public statements from academic libraries on the issues of diversity and racism, and fewer still have discussed collection-related themes. Matthews (2021) analyzed formal responses by Canadian libraries and library associations in the wake of the George Floyd murder, noting that only 7% of the academic libraries in the study had published such a statement (compared to 34% of the total sample), and that overall, the language of the responses was vague in terms of concrete commitments to action, and focused mainly on information sharing. Ely (2021) noted that only a small subset of the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion statements he found on the websites of members of the 16-member UBorrow consortium in 2020-2021 included non-neutral, action-oriented anti-racism and social justice language, which he compared favorably with the more vague language on the majority of sites that featured such statements. Research on academic library strategic plans and web pages published in the 2010s (Macaulay, 2023; Mestre, 2011; Saunders, 2015) does not mention anti-racism as a theme in the samples studied, though use of social justice language with respect to collection development was noted in a small number of documents reviewed in 2021 (Macaulay, 2023). Devarenne et al., including anti-racism implicitly within the broader category of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), found that few libraries shared policies relating EDI to collection development, and when they did, the policies "largely fail to articulate goals and values that are specific to their institutional context and collections" (2024, p. 3).

Method

The research employed a content analysis approach to investigate the nature and prevalence of discursive themes that connected anti-racism to collection development activities within a body of texts extracted from library websites. In its application in this research, content analysis is a qualitative methodology involving scrutiny of textual material to inductively develop a set of abstracted thematic categories reflecting the research questions, against which the individual texts are then checked to enumerate theme occurrences. The counts of occurrences are then analyzed to detect patterns or trends that will reflect features of the context – in this case, the professional milieu of academic librarians in North America (Julien et al., 2008).

The sample of texts analyzed in this research was drawn from the websites of member institutions of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) in the summer of 2023, excluding member libraries not affiliated with specific institutions of higher learning. This group of 120 institutions included the largest and most well-funded academic libraries in the US and Canada, geographically dispersed throughout these two countries; no other criteria were used in selecting this group of websites for the research or conducting the analysis. To locate statements for analysis, I used the Google "site:" search operator to search the web domains of each library for texts including the word "racism" (including cognate terms such as "racist" and anti-racist", by virtue of the search engine's stemming algorithm). While this method of locating relevant texts was relatively efficient, there was some risk of missing statements that might be related to the themes of concern but did not include variants of the word "racism"; restricting the search to the main web domains of the institutions studied also introduced the possibility that relevant texts residing on other domains might be omitted from results. Additionally, since the functioning of Google's search algorithms are not documented, there is no guarantee that the searches would reliably return the same results over repeated attempts. To supplement this search strategy, the websites were also browsed via their site content menus to verify that no relevant texts had been overlooked. From the texts identified in this way, I extracted statements addressing the specified topics in relation to library collections, collection development, or information resources. Since the analysis was concerned with statements about actions taken by libraries to address racism, texts that only described or listed library resources were not considered.

I analyzed the content of the extracted texts to identify themes articulating "what will the library do with its collections to address racism?" Through an iterative process of reviewing these statements, I developed a set of 43 detailed, conceptually distinct propositions, which I subsequently classified into broader categories that characterized a) the social groups referenced; b) the general thematic emphases of the statements; and c) any specific orientation that was articulated with respect to collection development practices, and to impact on the external world (see Appendix 1). Only a single researcher was involved, so validation of the theme definitions and their categorization was based solely on iterative readings of the texts. The website texts studied were invariably written in a direct, relatively unambiguous style, which simplified the process by reducing the need for extensive interpretive work. Ultimately, the analysis looked primarily at the specific groups – if any – that were named in the anti-racist themes addressed, and the explicit thematic focus of the statements on the following subject areas derived from the analysis:

- racism (including themes of racial injustice and white supremacy)
- justice (without specific reference to race)
- diversity
- equity, or inclusion of marginalized or underrepresented populations
- education or outreach

Additionally, statements were analyzed to identify which aspects of collections work were included in anti-racist efforts, and to determine whether they included explicit reference to the impact of these efforts on the external world.

Results

Documents on Library Sites Addressing Racism

Of the 120 libraries studied in the summer of 2023, the websites of 39% (n=47) featured some sort of text explicitly expressing a commitment to anti-racism or describing action in this area; this included documents describing DEI efforts that also mentioned anti-racism. Of this subset, 64% (n=30) referenced collection development, collections or library information resources in some relation to anti-racism. Five of the libraries hosted two such documents each on their sites, giving a total of 35 documents examined. These documents were mainly presented – though not always explicitly titled – as "statements" of position on the topics in question, but the set included other document types as well, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Document Types

Document Type	Number
Statement	24
Action plan	5
Group description	2
Project announcement	2
Group report	1
Statement update	1

All five library sites that featured two documents offered statements, accompanied by some other document type: two included action plans, with the remainder including a statement update, a group description, and a group report respectively.

A total of 73 theme occurrences were identified in the documents examined. As shown in Table 2, a slight majority of the documents (54%, n=19) articulated a single theme with respect to the implication of collection development activities in anti-racist action; these documents supplied 26% of the total set of theme occurrences examined. A smaller set of 16 documents (46%) included more extensive treatment of the topics of concern here, combining multiple themes and providing the majority of the content analyzed (74% of the total set of theme occurrences, n=54).

Table 2

Document Types and Numbers of Anti-racist Themes Per Document

Document Type	1 theme	2 themes	3 themes	4 themes	6 themes	Total themes
Statement	13	5	2	3	1	47
Action plan	4	-	-	1	-	8
Group description	-	-	-	2	-	8
Project announcement	2	-	-	-	-	2
Group report	-	-	-	-	1	6
Statement update	-	1	-	-	-	2
Total Documents	19	6	2	6	2	

Reference to Social Groups Implicated in Anti-Racism Efforts

Overall, the great majority of theme occurrences (71%, n=52) identified in this analysis did not specify any particular social group(s) that would be concerned in anti-racism; 19% of the theme occurrences (n=14) made reference to racial groupings including Black, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), African-American, and – on the site of one Canadian institution, – Indigenous people. No other specific racial/social groups were mentioned. A smaller number (10%, n=7) focused more generically on underrepresented or marginalized people as the concern of anti-racism.

Since the context of a theme's appearance alongside others in a given document will color its meaning to some extent, it is worth looking at the co-occurrence of thematic categories at the document level. Documents including multiple themes are counted in Table 3 if there is at least one occurrence of the more specific thematic category.

Table 3

Group References in Documents

Group Reference	Multi-themed Documents (n=16)	Single-theme Documents (n=19)
Black/BIPOC/Indigenous	8 (23% of total)	1 (3% of total)
Underrepresented populations	4 (11% of total)	2 (6% of total)
No group	4 (11% of total)	16 (46% of total)

Statements featuring a single theme were much more frequently generic with respect to the social groups concerned by collection development efforts in this area, for whatever reason: a desire to make the statements brief, a reluctance to be too specific in case particular groups were left out of the picture, or perhaps an assumption that readers would fill in the details. The documents including multiple themes more frequently related anti-racism explicitly to social groups defined by race, or by their historical marginalization. Still, only 26% of the total document set referred explicitly to racial groups in their treatment of anti-racism in collections, while 17% mentioned marginalized or underrepresented populations, leaving a clear majority (57%) that mentioned no group at all.

Thematic Focus of Statements on Anti-Racism

Analysis of keywords appearing in the 73 theme statements (hereafter termed "occurrences") about "what library collections will do to address racism" led to the identification of 5 primary subject areas into one of which each theme was classified. Overall, references to **diversity**, diversification, and related terms were most frequent (40%, n=29); **racism**, racial injustice, or white supremacy were explicitly mentioned in 27% of theme occurrences (n=20), while **equity** or **inclusion** (including references to diversification specifically with respect to underrepresented groups) were invoked in 25% (n=18). A handful of theme occurrences (4%, n=3) referenced **justice** (generally) or systemic inequity, and the same number focused on miscellaneous aspects of **education** or outreach such as publicizing collections or supporting relevant areas of study or types of research[2].

Table 4 shows the number of individual documents featuring themes in the various subject areas. In the slightly larger sample of 19 documents that included only a single theme, racism was more common as an explicit subject (appearing in 42% of those documents, n=8) than diversity or equity/inclusion, which were mentioned in five documents each (26%). Just one of these documents featured a theme of justice in general (5%), and none mentioned education. The set of 16 multi-themed documents featured a higher concentration of references to diversity (63% of multi-themed documents, n=10); 56% of these documents (n=9) included themes of equity/inclusion, and 44% (n=7) explicitly referenced racism. Smaller numbers included themes of education/outreach (19%, n=3) and justice (13%, n=2).

Table 4

Subject References in Documents

Subject	**Single-theme (n=19)**	**% of single-theme documents**	**Multi-theme (n=16)**	**% of multi-theme documents**	**Total (n=35)**	**% of total documents**
Diversity	5	26%	10	63%	15	43%
(Anti-) Racism/ racial injustice	8	42%	7	44%	15	43%
Equity/ Inclusion	5	26%	9	56%	14	40%
Justice	1	5%	2	13%	3	9%
Education	0	0%	3	19%	3	9%

[2] Since the texts in question were all identified as treating collections or collection development in relation to racism – that is, were presented in a context that implied racism as an overarching theme, – it might be suggested that all the documents could be included in the group of texts focusing on this subject. For this analysis, however, only statements that explicitly included racism-related keywords were classified in this way.

These numbers indicate that overall, while references to diversity predominated in the thematic statements in the sample as noted above – that is, there was a greater density of references to diversity than to the other subject areas this research is concerned with, – most of these references were in the multi-themed documents, while single-themed documents more frequently invoked racism as their main subject. The less substantial texts, understandably, kept their focus on racism; the more elaborate multi-themed documents, in providing more details or alternate language with respect to anti-racist action in the collections domain, included more references to diversity and equity or inclusion.

Conjunction of Group Reference with Thematic Focus

Figure 1 shows the frequency with which the various thematic subject areas appeared in conjunction with references to specific groups, or no group, within the individual themes. This breakdown of the collection development-related themes of anti-racist statements indicates that, overall, generic references to diversity and diversification clearly predominated (40%, n=29), with generic references to (anti-)racism being the next most prevalent (22%, n=16). Relatively few racism-related themes went so far as to specify the object of the racism in question; the most frequent specific references to African American/Black/BIPOC/Indigenous groups (over half of the total in the sample) were made in the context of equity or inclusion, and themes with this subject – not surprisingly – comprised all references to marginalized or underrepresented populations.

Figure 1

Subjects and Group References in Documents: Theme Occurrences

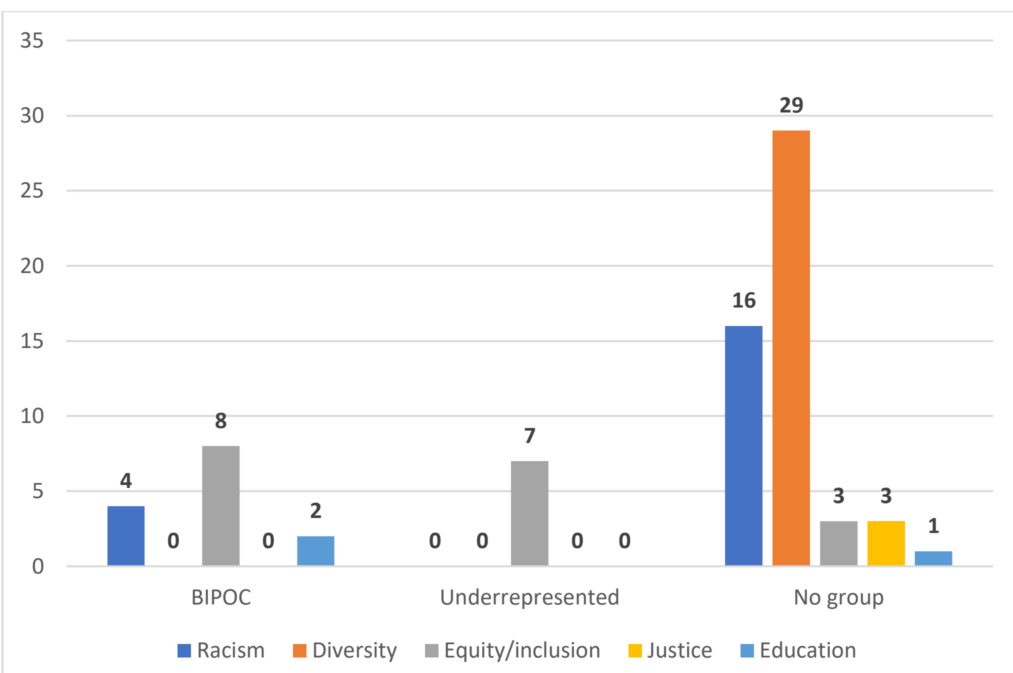
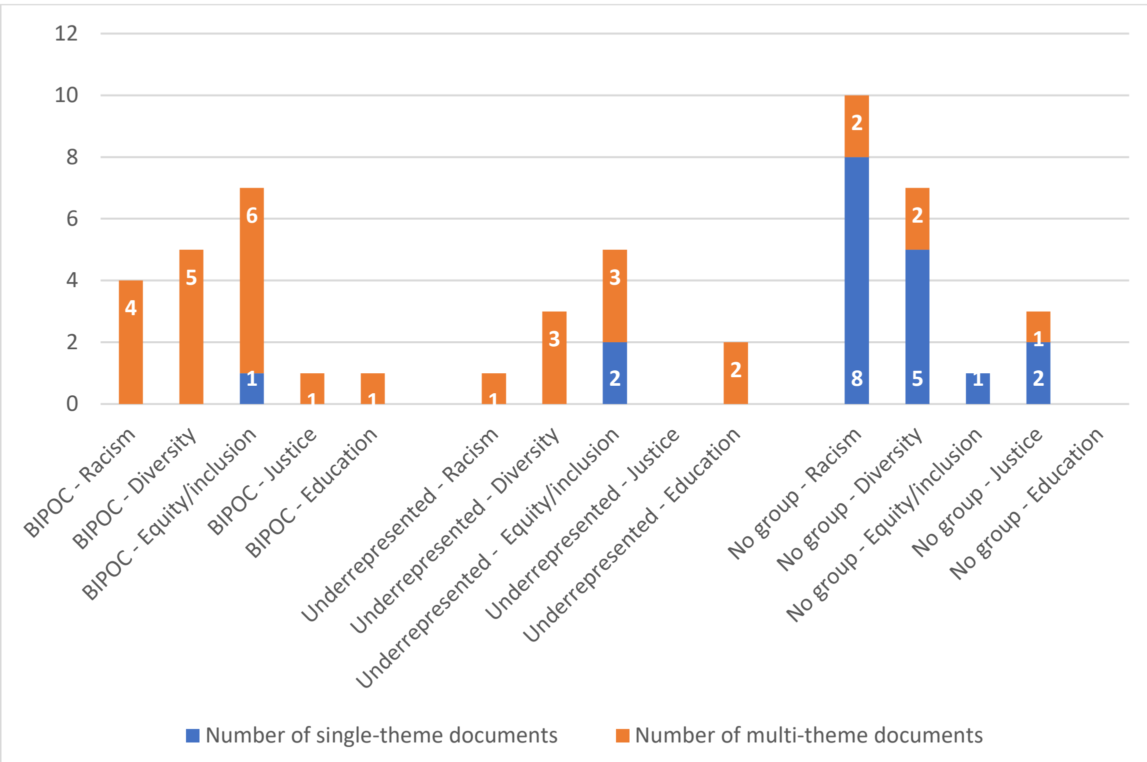


Figure 2 counts the occurrence of group references in conjunction with the various subject categories within documents, considering the context of multiple themes where present. The 16 multi-themed documents much more often positioned treatment of the subjects identified for this analysis alongside reference to Black, BIPOC, or Indigenous groups, or underrepresented or marginalized populations, than did the more cursory statements including a single theme[3].

Figure 2

Group-subject Co-occurrence in Documents



Collections Focus and External Impact

Themes were also analyzed for mention of the aspects of library collections that would be involved in the anti-racist activity described (terms in bold face are used in Table 5):

- **generic** (none specified)
- collection **composition**
- collection development **practices**

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[3] Because co-occurrences of group-subject pairs can overlap in the multi-themed documents – for example, a document referencing the BIPOC group could mention both racism and diversity in different themes, – the counts for multi-themed documents in Figure 2 exceed the total number of such documents.

- **outreach** about collections
- **access** to collections

The results, shown in Table 5, indicate that while a substantial portion of themes were generic – in that they did not specify any particular aspect of collections that would be involved in anti-racist work, – a clear majority were concerned with addressing racism through adjustments to the composition of collections. A smaller number described changes to collection development practices, mainly by committing to eliminating racism or bias from such practices or by making them more inclusive, but also specifically by diversifying material suppliers. A handful of themes concerned outreach about collections or access to them.

Table 5

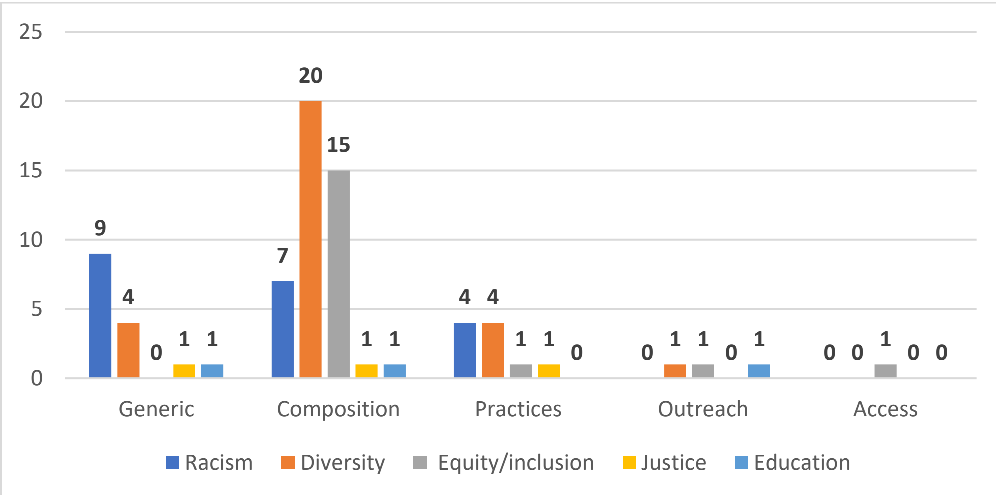
Collections Focus: Theme Occurrences

Collections Focus	Theme Occurrences	% of Total
Composition	44	60%
Generic	15	21%
Practices	10	14%
Outreach	3	4%
Access	1	1%

Breaking down the collections themes by the five subject categories used in this research (as shown in Figure 3) highlights the predominance of themes related to diversity or equity/inclusion with regard to the materials composing the collection, which represent close to half (48%, n=35) of all theme occurrences. The subject of racism mainly figured in themes with a generic collections focus (12%, N=9) or a focus on collection composition (10%, n=7), with a smaller number (5%, n=4) related to changes to collection development practices.

Figure 3

Collections Focus by Subject: Theme Occurrences



Finally, the analysis looked at how themes articulated the impact of the collections-related anti-racist efforts they described (see Table 6). While all the documents presented themes in the context of an implicit overarching intention to ameliorate the world by addressing racism, relatively few of the theme occurrences (22%, n=16) explicitly stated how this would be achieved. The majority of this subset (14% of total theme occurrences, n=11) mentioned challenging racism or injustice, or advancing justice, as the intended effect of collection development activities; much smaller numbers mentioned support for teaching and research (5%, n=4), or supporting anti-racist social action (1%, n=1).

Table 6

External Impact: Theme Occurrences

External Impact	Theme Occurrences	% of Total
Challenge racism/ advance justice	11	14%
Support for teaching/research	4	5%
Support for social action	1	1%

Discussion

Most of the texts analyzed in this research were relatively short and can be assumed to have been addressed to a wide audience with the aim of registering recognition of the George Floyd murder (along with similar crimes) as a manifestation of systemic racism and signaling current or planned efforts to counter this racism in various ways. With this understanding, it might be considered unlikely that these statements would address the finer details of collection development activity, when collections are mentioned as element of an organization's anti-racism at all. Unlike strategic plans or policy documents, these statements are typically not intended to guide library work, but rather to reflect on the position of the organization with regard to racism and indicate that consideration is being given to this problem.

However, because the texts in question were generally concerned with conveying serious engagement with urgent issues, specificity was often a theme. While a few simply mentioned plans to study the topic with the aim of identifying measures to address racism, the majority made a point of describing, in the form of commitment or pledge, the actions that would immediately be taken in this area. Moreover, just under a third of the texts were presented explicitly as action plans, descriptions of groups or projects intended to address racism, or updates to previous statements of commitment. And while well less than half (39%) of ARL academic libraries had statements or other texts addressing anti-racism on their sites in the summer of 2023, substantially more than half of those texts (64%) mentioned library collections or resources in this context.

With this overall emphasis on specific and effective action in mind, it is interesting to note the extent to which the treatment of anti-racist collections work in these texts exhibited the vagueness typical of much discourse about diversity. While the texts offered as a response to the murder of George Floyd and other African Americans were mainly framed to present their assertions in the context of anti-Black racism, nearly three-quarters of the theme occurrences identified in this analysis did not explicitly state this, or refer directly to any group that might be concerned by this issue; well over half of the documents examined did not refer to an affected group at all in direct relation to anti-racist collections efforts. The documents focused primarily on the concept of racism, in relative abstraction, with a parallel emphasis on diversity in more substantial texts that included two or more themes. Divorced from more specific language engaging with the local or national community that the libraries served, these commitments to anti-racism largely repurposed the more established language of diversity, by identifying collection diversification as the means of countering racist forces in society; in fact, a couple of the statements stated that the libraries were already engaged in these efforts through their diversity-related activities. Ultimately, the majority of statements acknowledged a lack of diversity in collections, implicitly resulting from the same systemic racism that has led to the deaths of so many people of color at the hands of law enforcement in the U.S., and the primary thrust of responses to this situation was on adding more materials to represent the communities that are the objects of racism, or on the topic of (anti-)racism itself.

This emphasis on diversifying the composition of library collections, especially when combined with a specific commitment to counter marginalization of Black (or BIPOC) people and their experience in the record of knowledge, should not be discounted as an approach to anti-racist collection development. As Morales et al. note in a frequently quoted statement, academic librarians in particular “are perhaps uniquely equipped and empowered to define and redefine systems of knowledge that convey ‘truths’ about how we know the world and how that knowledge is organized and evaluated” (2014, p. 445). Collection development choices that result in improved representation of historically marginalized groups present a library’s users with a universe of approved information that is more or less “decentered” from the traditional mainstream identified with whiteness – resulting not only in a potentially more welcoming experience for non-white users (Vega Garcı ́a, 2000), but also in improved support for research and further publication, and in turn for teaching, in areas that are of real impact and concern to those groups (Devarenne et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, aspirations to improve representational diversity in the collection may prove ineffective and unsustainable, if they do not include a clear definition of exactly what a relevant diversification effort would involve in the institution’s local context, and an understanding of how this may be impeded by librarians’ cultural bias as well as by engrained ways of conducting collection development and acquisitions. Emerging scholarship in this area has contributed to the identification of specific barriers to diversifying collections that are common in academic library work, and this is perhaps reflected in the statements studied here that included commitments to review collection development practices and modify them where they were found to be racist. However, these were far outnumbered in the sample by more cursory invocations of diversity, inclusion, and equity in the service of anti-racism that stopped short of providing a practical dimension for these concepts. Additionally, statements focused on addressing a more or less abstracted force of “racism” with a generalized solution of “diversity” neglected to acknowledge a local social context, where engagement with the people impacted by racism, – both within and external to the institution, – would help ensure collection development efforts are in touch with the needs and preferences of these communities. In this respect, it is striking how few of the statements in the sample specifically emphasized outreach or mentioned impact in the form of support for teaching and research or other anti-racist social action as a goal of collection development.

This discussion has intentionally bracketed questions around the purpose of statements from academic libraries acknowledging the problem of racism and announcing anti-racist initiatives. It has not considered whether such texts might be effective in attaining any particular aims or even if they are necessary at all. Rather, the analysis has treated these statements simply as a readily available corpus of public communications articulating specific orientations informing library work in general and collections work in particular. For this reason, no practical recommendations for crafting an effective statement will be offered here beyond acknowledging an assumption on the author's part that readers looking to be informed about an organizational response to racism and commitment to anti-racist work will likely value such statements according to their demonstration of thoughtfulness, compassion, and engagement – and conversely, discount them to the extent that they exhibit a reluctance to grapple with the thorny issue of how racial discrimination can be manifested and countered in the practical social context in which the organization operates.

Conclusion

Attention to issues of social justice has become increasingly prevalent in North American academic libraries over the first decades of the 21st century, and in the distinctive historical moment of 2020, was prominent in the public messaging of the numerous institutions that published timely anti-racist statements and related documents on their websites. Three years later, a substantial portion of the ARL-member academic libraries studied in this research continued to feature website texts expressing a commitment to anti-racism, and a majority of these statements included references to collection development activities. These texts largely focused on listing specific actions taken to address racism; however, the language used to describe the collection development activities included in these efforts showed a marked tendency to refer to racism in the abstract, without explicit connection to the populations concerned, along with a generalized emphasis on diversifying collection contents as the method for countering racial injustice. While these texts do not provide guidance in the same way as strategic planning or policy documents, they nevertheless stand as official statements reflecting institutions' approaches to addressing a vital social issue; in this respect, they could reasonably be expected to engage substantively with the implications of an anti-racist approach to library work. A growing body of scholarship focused on the ways racist structures of power can be reproduced through the operations of academic libraries suggests that attention to bias – both personal and systemic, – and efforts to engage with racialized groups within the institution's local community are essential components of a practical approach to anti-racist collection development. The evidence of the anti-racist statements analyzed in this research indicates that a number of libraries were prepared to scrutinize their collection development practices for bias; more than a few were also willing to identify the marginalized communities implicated in anti-racist efforts as specifically Black, African American, Indigenous, or people of color. The majority, however, appeared to invoke a more superficial notion of representational diversity that has questionable efficacy as an anti-racist strategy. Without a clearly understood and sincerely maintained connection to those whose very lives are put at risk in a racist society, institutional pledges to anti-racism are susceptible to interpretation as merely performative displays, similar to the cursory commitments to DEI found in many institutional statements on that topic (Macaulay, 2023). And, as the keywords associated with these concepts increasingly become lightning rods for censure from political actors, it becomes all the more crucial that libraries' approaches to countering racism in its various manifestations go beyond platitudes, and stay grounded in an understanding of how collection development can practically work against – or else contribute to – the unjust marginalization of racialized sectors of our community.

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Appendix 1: Themes and Categories

Theme: What will libraries do with respect to their collections to address racism?	Subject	Group	Collections Focus	External Impact
Diversify collection in all ways	Diversity	None	Collection composition	-
Diversify collection in terms of authorship/voices	Diversity	None	Collection composition	-
Diversify collection in terms of format	Diversity	None	Collection composition	-
Diversify collection in terms of language	Diversity	None	Collection composition	-
Diversify collection in terms of subject matter	Diversity	None	Collection composition	-
Diversify in terms of viewpoints	Diversity	None	Collection composition	-
Include non-traditional materials	Diversity	None	Collection composition	-
Represent diverse community (general)	Diversity	None	Collection composition	-
Represent diverse community (specific local community)	Diversity	None	Collection composition	-
Represent diverse community (university)	Diversity	None	Collection composition	-
Diversify vendors/sources	Diversity	None	Collection development practices	-
Promote/cultivate/celebrate diversity in collections	Diversity	None	Collection development practices	-
Increase awareness of diverse collections	Diversity	None	Collection outreach	-
Address DEI in general in collections	Diversity	None	Generic	-
Support diverse communities	Diversity	None	Generic	-
Support diverse views	Diversity	None	Generic	-
Support African American Studies	Education/ Outreach	Black/BIPOC/ Indigenous	Collection composition	Support for teaching/research
Promote or increase outreach around collections of works by people of color	Education/ Outreach	Black/BIPOC/ Indigenous	Collection outreach	-

Support emerging interdisciplinary research	Education/ Outreach	None	Generic	Support for teaching/research
Include BIPOC perspectives	Inclusion/ Equity	Black/BIPOC/ Indigenous	Collection composition	-
Include Black/BIPOC authors	Inclusion/ Equity	Black/BIPOC/ Indigenous	Collection composition	-
Include materials by Black authors on allyship	Inclusion/ Equity	Black/BIPOC/ Indigenous	Collection composition	-
Represent Black, BIPOC, African American history/culture	Inclusion/ Equity	Black/BIPOC/ Indigenous	Collection composition	-
Diversify collections in terms of subject areas related to underrepresented groups	Inclusion/ Equity	Marginalized populations	Collection composition	-
Include or amplify marginalized/underrepres ented voices/perspectives	Inclusion/ Equity	Marginalized populations	Collection composition	-
Increase equity of access to collections	Inclusion/ Equity	None	Access	-
Make collection development work more inclusive and equitable, from an anti-racist perspective	Inclusion/ Equity	None	Collection development practices	-
Promote collections that have been excluded	Inclusion/ Equity	None	Collection outreach	-
Include materials on inequities in the U.S.	Justice	None	Collection composition	-
Address systemic bias and inequity in collections	Justice	None	Collection development practices	Challenge racism/injustice; advance justice
Advance social justice	Justice	None	Generic	Challenge racism/injustice; advance justice
Include materials that address/challenge anti-black racism in particular	Racism	Black/BIPOC/ Indigenous	Collection composition	Challenge racism/injustice; advance justice
Address/challenge anti-indigenous racism in particular through collections	Racism	Black/BIPOC/ Indigenous	Generic	Challenge racism/injustice; advance justice
Include anti-racist resources	Racism	None	Collection composition	-
Include materials on racism (general)	Racism	None	Collection composition	-

Include materials relevant to anti-racist movements	Racism	None	Collection composition	Support for social action
Support research/inquiry into racial injustice	Racism	None	Collection composition	Support for teaching/research
Eliminate racist practices in collections	Racism	None	Collection development practices	-
Eliminate white privilege/white supremacy-related practices in collections	Racism	None	Collection development practices	-
Address/challenge racism in collections in specific ways (for example, fill gaps)	Racism	None	Collection development practices	Challenge racism/injustice; advance justice
Address/challenge white supremacy in general through collections	Racism	None	Generic	-
Address/challenge racism in general through collections	Racism	None	Generic	Challenge racism/injustice; advance justice
Support anti-racist pedagogy	Racism	None	Generic	Support for teaching/research

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Column: Innovation in Libraries

Visible Teaching, Invisible Systems: Rethinking my Approach to Library Instruction

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ABSTRACT
This reflective essay examines how resource sharing, particularly interlibrary loan (ILL), can bridge the gap between library instruction theory and actual student research behavior. Drawing on my experience as an early-career academic librarian, I explore how engaging with resource-sharing workflows can transform "invisible" library systems into valuable sources of pedagogical insight. I present three practical approaches for integration: emphasizing "access literacy" alongside traditional search skills, normalizing ILL as a core component of the research process, and using borrowing data to identify specific gaps in student understanding. Ultimately, this essay argues for an integrated model of librarianship that breaks down traditional silos to create more responsive, transparent, and effective information literacy instruction.

KEYWORDS
academic libraries, resource sharing, interlibrary loan, information literacy, access literacy, experiential learning in libraries.

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Introduction

After completing my MLIS, I entered academic librarianship well-versed in instructional theory. I engaged students in lectures that were complemented by practical examples. But something felt missing and I could not figure out what. It wasn't until multiple semesters later, when I inherited the responsibility for managing the library's resource sharing, that I began to recognize a gap in my teaching. I was largely disconnected from the systems that shape how students actually access information. The materials students borrowed from other libraries showed me what they were researching and how they were doing it. This shift suggested that resource sharing could function not only as a service point but as a lens for improving instruction. Interlibrary loan, in this way, became a form of pedagogical insight that ultimately reshaped how I teach.

Instruction and resource sharing are often on opposite ends of the library operation spectrum. In practice, resource sharing is reactive, often situated at the end of the research process. The patron has already practiced searching to find several materials to answer their research questions. Resource sharing is an invisible, logistical operation of the library, where most of the work happens behind the scenes (Schmidt, 2017). Instruction librarianship differs from resource sharing librarianship. Because instruction serves as the primary touchpoint for engagement, it is frequently used to demonstrate and advocate for the library's value to the campus community (O'Clair, 2012). This makes instruction proactive, visible, and public facing. However, by focusing primarily on this outward-facing service of instruction, we risk ignoring the invisible systems of access that shape the student's actual research experience. Reconsidering this separation opens up new possibilities for aligning instruction more closely with student research behavior.

This short essay outlines some lessons I've learned as an early-career librarian who works at the intersection of resource sharing and instruction. My focus is on how resource sharing can influence instruction, though the relationship is mutually reinforcing. Librarianship is an evolving field, and these tips are not only methods to integrate resource sharing into instruction, but they are ones that I've adopted over the last three years. Each lesson will include a brief description, an idea for implementation, and a personal anecdote about how I've implemented it. Taken together, these approaches offer a practical model for integrating resource sharing into instruction in ways that are both scalable and adaptable across institutional contexts.

Tip One: Teach "Access Literacy" Not Just Search Literacy

Instruction often prioritizes search literacy at the expense of access literacy. Although the term "access literacy" is not explicitly defined within the literature, the concept is embedded throughout the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, particularly in the frames Information Has Value and Searching as Strategic Exploration (Association of College &

Research Libraries [ACRL], 2015). I define access literacy as the functional knowledge required to navigate the technical and financial barriers between a discovery tool and the physical or digital item.

After taking over our library's research sharing, I noticed that students were requesting materials that the library already owns. Even though we have a link resolver, they did not understand how it worked and assumed that if a database lacked full-text access, the library did not have access. This reflects a simple process that librarians take for granted, but students struggle to conceptualize. In addition, I observed that many lending requests from other libraries were for open-access materials, indicating that access literacy is not a localized challenge. These recurring request patterns in student behavior are not always visible within the classroom itself.

Access literacy is a large umbrella under information literacy and, therefore, implementation for teaching access literacy is dependent on the goals and discipline of the class. For example, in an introductory course focused on finding fewer than ten articles or using primarily full-text databases, resource sharing may receive less emphasis than in a course with an intricate research question using indexes. Both contexts demonstrate access literacy, albeit in different ways. The depth of instruction is at the discretion of the librarian, but strategies might include an icebreaker about encountering paywalled articles, a discussion about how information comes to the library (subscription vs open access) or reviewing database holdings report that breaks down full text versus indexed content. Even small interventions can make access a more visible part of the research process.

In my instruction, I weave access literacy throughout the session. I start with a video showing how an idea comes to the library. I have learned that taking about five minutes at the beginning of class to discuss this process sets students up for later explanations about how interlibrary loan operates. Later in the session, I explain the basics of interlibrary loan and the link resolver. Rather than only explaining how interlibrary loan works, I demonstrate it directly within database workflows in both introductory and upper-division classes. It takes about five minutes to explain and walk through the process, which is valuable class time, but anecdotally, since I have started doing so, I have had fewer students ask me how to access a specific resource.

Tip Two: Normalize ILL as Part of the Research Process, not a Last Resort

In my experience, many students today operate with an expectation of immediate digital availability. This mindset can shape their perception of interlibrary loan, sometimes leading them to view it as a secondary option or a last resort rather than a standard means of accessing information. From my observations at the reference desk and in the classroom, this perception appears to influence not only how students use interlibrary loan but also how they conceptualize the boundaries of library collections. Rather than treating lack of immediate access as a failure of the collection, instruction librarians can frame interlibrary loan as a routine component of the research process, helping to normalize the reality that no single library can provide immediate access to every resource.

The immediate access mindset leads to an unintended consequence: students need an article urgently, and the library does not have it. Many academic librarians have multiple stories of panicked students searching for a source hours before the deadline. While instruction cannot eliminate this behavior, it may minimize it. Intentionally mentioning interlibrary loan processing times helps address students' needs and encourages them to begin research earlier.

A simple, yet effective, idea for implementation is to integrate interlibrary loan into the session outline, even in multiple places. Instruction often conveys implicit messages; for example, presenting resource sharing at the end suggests it is a last resort. Introducing it earlier helps position interlibrary loan as a standard part of research rather than a fallback, while reinforcing the concept of access literacy.

I integrate interlibrary loan into two sections of my outline. First, when discussing database types, I cover subject-specific versus general databases and explain the distinction between indexes and full-text databases, noting that most fall somewhere in between. I introduce interlibrary loan in the context of indexes, connecting it to access literacy by explaining that, due to subscription costs, indexes expand awareness of available information even without immediate access. Second, when discussing how to access materials, I demonstrate how to place an interlibrary loan request. Before doing so, I apply a full-text filter to show that more than half of the results disappear when limiting to full-text. This illustrates that requesting materials from other libraries is a normal part of the research process.

Tip Three: Recognize ILL Patterns to Shape Instruction

Students often borrow materials that do not answer their research questions. While dead ends are a natural part of the iterative research process, they can also stem from not understanding which information types fit specific needs. Analyzing borrowing requests allows a librarian to see exactly where a student's search strategy collided with reality. By identifying recurring errors in resource sharing, we can transform back-end logistics into a source of pedagogical insight, allowing us to adjust future instruction to address specific gaps in student understanding.

Since students have not yet been prompted to submit requests, librarians cannot analyze interlibrary loans for a specific class before it meets. However, past data can inform future instruction. This can be as simple as downloading an anonymized report of borrowing requests and reviewing it for patterns. While it is impossible to distinguish every mistaken request from an intentional one, patterns can still reveal where students struggle. Though imperfect, this approach offers a practical way to incorporate user behavior into instruction.

Given the demands of the semester, it is not realistic to run and analyze reports for every department and class section. Instead, I focus on specific classes I regularly visit. While I cannot directly tie each request to a class session, context often provides enough clarity. If I teach a class on Shakespeare and see a request the next day for prenatal nursing materials, I can reasonably assume it was not prompted by the session. At the end of each semester, I select between three and five class sessions to analyze. For each, I run borrowing reports for two weeks after each class session and review them by hand for patterns. This practice helps align instruction with how students actually navigate research challenges. At a small academic institution, request volumes are often low, and patterns are not always clear. Still, there have been a few instances where this process led me to significantly adjust my teaching to address clear information literacy gaps.

For example, I noticed a recurring pattern in a literature class where multiple students were requesting what they thought were books but were actually book reviews. This pattern revealed that students were struggling to distinguish between resource types in the catalog record. Now, when I visit that class, I make a point to explicitly demonstrate how to identify a review versus a full monograph. Similarly, in a religious studies course, I noticed students requested entire biblical commentaries through interlibrary loan, which were frequently non-circulating and thus went unfilled. I adjusted my instruction to show students how to request specific section scans instead. In both cases, the invisible data of the ILL workflow provided the exact roadmap needed to improve the visible instruction in the classroom.

Conclusion

After three years, I still am not an expert, but my definition of "good instruction" has shifted. I am intentionally working to reach students where they are by highlighting that interlibrary loan is part of the research process. My focus on pedagogical best practices is not absent, but rather reframed through the idea that the visible act of instruction is complemented by the invisible act of resource sharing. When siloed, these services are still beneficial for students, but when they are integrated, it enhances instruction by grounding pedagogy in real user behavior, not just theory.

As I continue experimenting with integrating resource sharing into my instruction, I have come to see back-end systems not only as mechanisms of access but as tools of pedagogy. The data, patterns, and even misunderstandings that emerge through these systems offer a form of feedback that is often absent from the classroom itself. My hope for the future of library instruction is that we intentionally recognize and use these systems as teaching tools to make visible the processes that shape how students find, access, and ultimately understand information. By doing so, instruction becomes not only more responsive but more honest about the realities of research as it is actually practiced.

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Book Review

Review of *Data Culture in Academic Libraries: A Practical Guide to Building Communities, Partnerships, and Collaborations*

Hector Escobar, University of Dayton

ABSTRACT

Review of *Data culture in academic libraries: A practical guide to building communities, partnerships, and collaborations*, edited by Marcela Y. Isuster and Alisa Beth Rod. Association of College and Research Libraries, 2025. 338 pp. ISBN 9798892556156.

KEYWORDS

Data literacy, data services, outreach

SUGGESTED CITATION

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As academic libraries have evolved through the years, demands for new services and expertise have also evolved. One area that has seen growth is data services and collections. In the book *Data Culture in Academic Libraries: A Practical Guide to Building Communities, Partnerships, and Collaborations*, editors Marcela Isuster and Alisa Beth Rod showcase a dynamic collection of chapters on all things data related. The editors' goal is to help academic librarians and data specialists cultivate data culture, defined as the "norms, values, skills, and behaviors that shape how data is produced, shared, and used in a given content" (p.ix). The editors have identified chapter contributors who represent a broad geographical scope of institutions and can showcase a variety of case studies. The chapters offer a good mix of narratives, lessons learned, techniques, and outcomes. Reflections provide a different perspective beyond what is purely theoretical. The book is organized into 21 chapters within five sections.

Section 1, "Data at All Levels," looks at embedding data practices across undergraduate, graduate, faculty, and institutional contexts. Chapters in this section showcase how data literacy, data management, and data services can become part of the whole academic institution. The first chapter begins by providing a short history of open data sharing and its impact on academic libraries. The authors discuss work done within special collections and showcase items that would be considered data sets, like archival lighthouse records from the 1870s. The chapter highlights the value of data within these types of digitized collections. Other chapters in his section highlight using collections to teach students, data used in academic accreditation, and the skills and proficiencies needed to engage with students regarding data literacy.

Section 2, "Data Services and Instruction," addresses how academic libraries can design, deliver, and sustain services and instructional programs that center around data. Beginning with Chapter 6, the authors share their experiences in the creation and delivery of an online professional development program aimed at library professionals. They share the course learning objectives and the pedagogical approach of this program. The focus on pedagogy carries through other chapters in the section, including a chapter that describes the evolution of a data literacy program at Carnegie Mellon University. Also included in this section are chapters that focus on data visualization and pedagogy. The authors highlight the importance of how critical reflection feeds into data visualization, and that pedagogy is simply not just "how to make charts."

Section 3, "Data Outreach," focuses on how academic libraries can proactively engage their institutional communities around data. The chapters in this section provide great examples that extend beyond library services and showcase how libraries are engaging their campus communities by designing events, activities, and outreach initiatives that highlight awareness of data and build literacy around it and help to embed data services and practices into institutional culture. Chapter 11, for example, focuses on International Love Data Week and provides practical suggestions around scalability and what may or may not be possible to host during that week. It offers some great examples of in-person and either passive or asynchronous models. All chapters in this section highlight examples of engagement in their effort to shed light on data culture at their institution. They share successes and challenges and provide food for thought for future planning.

Section 4, “Data Communities,” consists of chapters that explore how academic libraries can pivot beyond the traditional workshop model or one-off session and instead build long lasting communities of practice around data. Each chapter highlights different models and case studies. Chapter 14 showcases examples of creating instances that can help both data culture and data communities through activities like book and video discussions, panels, and student-led programming. Chapter 15 highlights the creation and organization of data squads that engage researchers on campus. This chapter shares working models from both Carleton College and UCLA and provides examples of some of the work these data squads provide to researchers, including one project that analyzed autopsy reports stemming from law enforcement encounters (p. 217).

Section 5, “Data Partnerships,” highlights several case studies that illustrate how academic libraries form and retain partnerships with external stakeholders. The entire section sheds light on how libraries can act as proactive agents in the research-data ecosystem, rather than passive service providers. For example, in Chapter 18, a case study describes how a library engaged with its user community and partners to develop services that created a mutually beneficial model when resources were limited. Other chapters, such as Chapter 21, offer a glimpse into what a consortia model of data partnerships can look like by showcasing the creation of a Canadian dataverse through a community of practice, and how that data structure model evolved as a consortia effort.

Throughout the book there are several examples of case studies that highlight how practical and useful the use of data practices can be when working with various types of collections. Examples include analyzing records of a historic Black cemetery and partnering with researchers working with a Mandarin Chinese audio database. Many of the case studies are presented in ways that can spark ideas about one’s own institution. While many of the chapters share lessons learned, the overarching theme of these stories is that of evolution and refinement to advance data culture within academic communities that include the library.

This book differs from others that focus on research data or the “how to” of teaching data literacy or setting up a repository. Rather, this book dives into how we can build communities, partnerships, and values that appreciate and utilize data. There are examples throughout the book that highlight areas of diversity, anti-racism, inclusive data practices, and even biases that may be generated by data collection. There are, however, some limitations to this book. This book does not offer step-by-step guidance for establishing a data repository or curating data collections, but rather focuses on culture, partnership, and programming. Another limitation may be the size of the institutions featured in the cases. Some are larger institutions that may have dedicated data librarians or staff, rather than smaller institutions where there may not be dedicated roles or sufficient resources.

Of the many takeaways throughout this book, one common theme is the willingness to engage and learn from experiences. The book shares that for many of the programs showcased, it is valuable to learn from what may not have worked well and to revise and refine from these experiences. For example, Chapter 14 shares the experience that many of us have had when attendance was low for a program that we spent a lot of time developing. The author shares a quote from Peter Block, “social capital is created one room at a time, the one we are in at the moment” (p. 205). The author goes on to explain that events may not have turned out as many people as we had hoped but nonetheless may result in better interactions that can help data communities develop over time.

In terms of recommended audiences, this book is a great read for any library professional looking to develop or expand data services and has an interest in developing data culture and partnerships at their institution. Administrators might find this book helpful to build or supplement strategic initiatives around data that could involve stakeholders who may be external to the library. Even if you have been involved with data services for a while, this book can serve as inspiration from peer institutions with programmatic examples. Overall, this book presents a robust and forward-thinking approach for practical and comprehensible data engagement that also promotes data culture.

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Essay

A Reminiscence and A Celebration

Stephen P. Weiter, *Emeritus Editor-in-Chief, Retired*

ABSTRACT

This essay is a look back at the founding of the *Journal of New Librarianship* and the success it has achieved over the past ten years. The essay acknowledges the contributions of those many people on the editorial board, the peer reviewers, and the contributors who have made the journal a successful Open Access publication.

KEYWORDS

Open Access, Congratulations, Success, Thank You, Eleventh Edition, Tenth Year, Twentieth Issue

SUGGESTED CITATION

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It's difficult, looking back to the start of a project and attempting to accurately remember what your thought process and goals were at the outset. It's easy to conflate later goals and objectives with the original ones, and to claim milestones as objectives only after they have been achieved. Some memories are quite clear, however. I knew I wanted to start an Open Access journal in the Library Sciences; I knew that I wanted it to be completely free of fees to both authors and readers. Aside from that, I don't think I knew very much.

When Matthew Kopel, David Lankes, and I started discussing starting this journal in 2015, we talked about bringing in authors from outside academic libraries, and about non-textual submissions and other non-traditional journal content. We committed to the Creative Commons CC-BY licensing levels as our default standard for content.

I've always maintained that there is a very thin line between "having a vision" and "seeing things." I am sure we had no certain illusions that the journal would still be around in 2026 — although I know I hoped that it would last. I held that hope despite a bumpy launch, and some early struggles to refine the peer review process. We had also seen some other early attempts at Open Access publishing fizzle out. Yet, we managed to assemble an incredible team, got the first issue published in 2016, and kept building from there.

When I retired, I did not want to see the Journal end just because my career was winding down. I had been an editorial board member of another earlier OA journal that suddenly ceased. I wanted those who had made the Journal a success to have the chance to keep it going. And oh! Have they! Members of our Editorial Board kept the Journal alive, relevant, and publishing valuable content into a new decade.

And so here we are, and the *Journal of New Librarianship* — a barrier free, open-access, peer-reviewed journal that charges neither authors nor readers for content, is celebrating its TWENTIETH issue, its ELEVENTH volume, and its TENTH year of publication. Given the many very talented hands that have had a role in the Journal's success, I am not surprised, but it is very gratifying to see the Journal continue as it has. Along the way it has gained recognition as worthy of a listing in *Ulrich's* and of inclusion in the *Library of Congress Archives*.

The *Journal of New Librarianship* not only survived but continues to thrive in today's challenging academic environment. And the Journal continues to be relevant while keeping its commitment to diversity, equity, and a plurality of opinions.

All that success is due to the contributions of a very dedicated and talented Editorial Board, many of whom have been with *JoNL* since day one. Those "veterans" have also consistently recruited new members and fresh outlooks, and new creativity that helps to provide the spark that drives the engine that is the free flow of information. The *JoNL* has also benefitted from the tireless efforts of volunteer peer reviewers. Those folk continue to do an often-thankless task of providing feedback. They are the backbone of the Journal.

Lastly, much credit for the success of the *JoNL* has to go to the very many fine authors and content creators who have chosen to publish with us over the years. Special thanks to those who published in the Journal in the very early days, when it was unclear if tenure credit for publishing in an unheralded OA journal would be granted, or even if we would be around very long. We had to earn your trust, and you took some big risks in trusting the Journal in its nascent stages. Your faith in this team has (I hope) been rewarded.

My sincerest, heartfelt thanks to everyone who has contributed in every way to making this project a lasting success.

According to Liu, Hu, et.al., many journals cease publication after three or four years. [1] The Journal of New Librarianship has far exceeded that standard. This publication has shown that high quality, peer reviewed articles can be published and shared at no cost to the authors and end-users of that information. I raise a glass to toast the success of the Journal of New Librarianship, and hope that it continues to provide that shining example for another ten years – and longer.

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Essay

Librarianship, After the Information Shock

R. David Lankes, *The University of Texas*

ABSTRACT

In 2019 I wrote of the need for a new librarianship centered on knowledge, and the learning conversation. While that argument holds seven years later, I did not anticipate that those conversations could be held with a non-human conversant. This is causing an Information Shock whose impact goes far beyond the synthetic documents AI can produce, only an extension of the last shock. The deeper disruption is that AI can now instill beliefs, true and false, without accountability. This goes well beyond current efforts in AI literacy. It calls for a full embrace of the new librarianship and a new role for librarians as the accountable conversant in these AI-Human exchanges, standing on the side of the person to ground understanding in evidence and culture. We must claim that role now, because whether this shock unfolds through opaque commercial systems or something for the public good remains a choice.

KEYWORDS

Artificial intelligence, Information Shock, Conversations

SUGGESTED CITATION

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My 2019 piece (Lankes, 2020) was, in essence, one long argument that we needed to reconceptualize librarianship around knowledge and how people learn. Librarianship had transformed around the society it sought to serve. For Dewey, it was an engine because all around him was an industrial age driven by steam. In the last third of the twentieth century, the library was an information organization, retrieving documents and answering queries. The time had come, so I asserted, to acknowledge that the center of everything a library did was a person seeking to make their life better through being smarter (learning, building knowledge).

I think those arguments, which I won't take the time to repeat, hold up. Twenty-first century librarianship can be seen as a move toward the individual who, as part of a community, seeks to build knowledge. Reference has transformed from matching a need to a resource to an instructional encounter to build a better understanding of a topic. Collections have transformed from owned print collections to hybrid tools ready to deploy to a community need.

Some of this transformation has been rhetorical, but we also see solid examples. When Oslo built their new central library in the heart of downtown, it culled its collection by 50% to make room not for future growth of materials, but for their neighbors to come and work and convene. The TU Delft academic library built a wall of collections more as inspiration to the stacked workspaces of students than as a direct service.

However, what I did not see in 2019 was that the groundwork for this new librarianship created a perfect platform for a new type of knowledge-building interaction. An interaction that I argued was fundamental to librarianship, the learning conversation, has now met a new moment: an Information Shock brought on by generative artificial intelligence.

Information Shocks[2], while rare, have occurred throughout history when the means of information production is disrupted and/or transformed. You are living at the end of the last shock that occurred at the end of World War II with the massive influx of scientific and technical information amplified by the introduction of the digital computer. It was this shock, still disrupting over 80 years later, that transformed librarianship into Library and Information Science. It was a shock that moved the document into the central place of the field over the book. It led to new tools like information retrieval and the search engine. It forced us to confront issues like information overload and the scourge of disinformation.

Today we face a new shock from generative AI, but it is not the one you are probably thinking of. Yes, AI can produce masses of new documents (reports, songs, code, essays, books). And yes, AI can absolutely produce slop and aid in misinformation campaigns.

However, that effect of AI is just an extension of the previous shock. That is still producing document-like objects that can be identified, interrogated, and collected (or dismissed). That form of AI authorship is the reason this journal has an AI policy that is all about output (what words did it produce, what was the prompt, what was the tool). That aspect of AI is the reason for AI literacy. But that form of AI authorship is actually accounted for in the 2019 article and the move of collections as secondary to learning.

The real shock from AI can be seen in an assumption right there in the middle of the 2019 article, the assumption that the parties in a knowledge building conversation had to be human. While I stand by the assertion that knowledge is inherently human (it can't be recorded or shelved and I am far from convinced it lies in a Large Language Model), I can no longer say that the conversations that build knowledge have to be wholly human.

It is the second form of AI authorship that is causing our current Information Shock. Now when a person seeks to learn about something and they go to Google, Google doesn't present them with a list of possible resources; it gives an answer. What's more, that answer is followed up by a list of questions. A person answering those questions can now refine, push back, argue, and ask for more. And here is the important part, so can Google. Google (or more precisely Gemini) does not have to be conscious to do this. We don't have to wait for the mythical artificial general intelligence for this to happen. It is happening right now.

When I called for a librarianship based on learning and conversation, I didn't foresee a conversant that could not only pass the Turing test, but one that did so by ripping apart the contents of the internet (and a lot of copyrighted materials without permission) into tens of billions of parameters. When one of our community members searches with Claude or ChatGPT, they are not being presented with documents to pick from, they are being presented with a stochastic reply based on a non-deterministic training process that engages a person. A process that builds rapport and has been shown to create affective relations.

In my 2019 piece, I talked about the limitations of information literacy. Here we see the limitation of AI literacy. Sure, students can use these tools to cheat and write an essay. But we see people turning to these tools for medical advice, voting advice, even for companionship when lonely. The results of these conversations are not a document that can be checked; they are the medicine taken, the candidate supported, the sadness abated. And no literacy can touch this.

All this fits perfectly with the model presented in the 2019 piece. People seek out these conversations to learn AND connect. What isn't fully stated in the earlier article is that when knowledge is built, nothing says that the knowledge is truth or correct. It is assumed that librarians standing in these interactions do so to ensure a match to evidence and community norms. With AI conversants, there is no such guarantee. In fact, we have plenty of evidence from hallucinated evidence to delusion-building cognitive reinforcement, that AI is not an accountable conversant. The shock is not the scale of synthetic documents AI can produce, it is the scale of beliefs, true and false, that AI can instill without accountability.

And so, we see the road ahead for the new librarianship in the evolution from the shock. Librarians need to build community so that all feel welcome to test out their new beliefs. Librarians must be the accountable conversant in these conversations, not be the human in the loop. There already is a human in the loop: the person with the question. They need to be the human on the side of that person grounding understanding in reality and culture. Those hybrid collections still need curation, but as grounding for new learning, rather than as starting points for it.

Once again, this shock is happening, and it is happening now. It is happening in the change in how much time people spend on Google result pages because they are now reading answers rather than picking pointers. It is happening as seen when Pew reported earlier this year that about half of American adults are using chatbots, and most of them read the AI-written summary at the top of a search result rather than the sources beneath it.

Let me close this reflection with this. Please do not read these words as an endorsement of AI as it is. While it is happening now, it doesn't have to happen through a world of commercial companies that lack transparency and are consuming massive natural resources to privatize the internet. That is a choice. An Information Shock is as disruptive to OpenAI and Google as it is to you and me. By seeing our libraries not just as places for a community, but as an instrument of our communities' need for a greater good, we must guide the ripples of this shock toward better outcomes for those that we serve, the field, and society at large. I called for a new librarianship. Now is the time for that new librarianship to get to work.

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Essay

Reflection: Trouble for a New Generation in Librarianship

Allan Van Hoye, *University of Colorado Boulder*

ABSTRACT

Eight years after publishing Trouble for a New Generation in Librarianship, the author reflects on his experience now. Drawing on a decade of professional experience the author argues that many structural inequities identified in 2018 remain. The profession continues to rely heavily on prior library experience, often gained through low-paying, part-time, or unpaid work creating significant barriers for those from marginalized backgrounds. The author continues to argue that libraries must pursue more equitable pathways into the profession through paid opportunities and broader recognition of transferable experience. The reflection builds on these ideas to include two other important factors: mentorship and the exposure of librarianship's hidden curriculum. By expanding access to both, libraries can better support new professionals and advance equity, opportunity, and inclusion.

KEYWORDS

Mentorship, Hidden Curriculum, Professional Growth

SUGGESTED CITATION

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Reflection of *Trouble for a New Generation in Librarianship*

Eight years ago, I wrote one of my first articles as a librarian, *Trouble for a New Generation in Librarianship (Van Hoye 2018)*. At the time of writing the article I had just landed my first professional job after graduating with my master's degree. While I was and still am thankful for this job, it was a temporary position that had the basic benefits, was underpaid, and overburdened by work others couldn't do. I am one of the lucky few who was able to successfully turn this into a permanent position. Unfortunately, the structural and institutional issues new librarians faced at that time still exist today, in addition to the growing threat of anti-intellectualism, skepticism of the freedom of speech, and the rise of authoritarianism.

After 10 years and serving on countless search committees, watching deans come and go, and talking at nauseum with colleagues about the profession, I cannot help but feel as though much of what I wrote eight years ago is still true. Sure, there is nuance to some of my points, but my views on inequality and opportunity in the profession have hardened. When I think about the barriers to becoming a librarian, both institutionally and societally, the cards are stacked against library students and new librarians; especially those who do not come from privileged backgrounds. The trouble I saw a decade ago is still present in our profession. With that said, as I 've grown in my profession and experience my perspectives have evolved, and while the problems persist, there are things that can help that I haven't considered before.

At the core of *Trouble for a New Generation in Librarianship* was the connection between a saturated talent pool and the emphasis of library specific experience in the hiring process, specifically that often to get this experience you have to take low paying or unpaid positions. After being on numerous search committees. I have gained perspective on why this happens. When looking through hundreds of applications it is hard not to prefer candidates with experience because experience does matter. This is a structural issue that cannot easily be solved by one institution or group. However, inequity persists and creates lack of opportunity for marginalized groups, and we have an obligation as a profession to work against this inequity. Paid opportunities are still important to push against inequity. Unpaid and low paying positions prioritize people with ability to be supported outside of work.

Further, as a profession we should consider how library schools support and prepare library students. I don't know how we address the issue of more graduates than jobs, but we can start by making it clear that the profession is competitive and prepare students for this competition. On social media you will often see advice that if you don't work in a library, you should not go to library school. While I understand the practicality of this advice, this cannot be allowed to become the norm uncontested. Libraries are for all, and all should have the opportunity to work in libraries.

One of the core values of ALA is "Library workers play a crucial role in fostering equity by actively working to dismantle barriers and create spaces that are accessible, welcoming, and beneficial for all (American Library Association 2024)." We cannot accomplish this if librarian positions are exclusive to those with traditional library experience. Beyond the loss of outside knowledge, it creates a feedback loop of exclusivity. Library positions are difficult to obtain with many entry level positions being volunteer, low paying, or part time. The only people who can take these positions are those with the ability to work for less. To get higher paying positions one has to have experience, even with a degree. Which means that only those who can afford to take low paying or temporary positions get higher paid positions. This doesn't even account for the cost and time it takes to get a master's degree. The traditional process can never be equitable, and the only solutions are either pay more or accept different kinds of related experience. We should be doing both. Certainly, there are positions that require experience, but when hiring, libraries should be honest about what they are hiring for. It is not an entry level position if you will not be considered without any library experience. This is true whether the job posting says so. This has not changed since I originally wrote the original article.

Lessons I have learned

This leads me to two lessons I have learned in the last decade that are missing in *Trouble for A New Generation in Librarianship*; the importance of mentorship and the need to expose the hidden curriculum. Unwritten rules, ideas, and social norms are all a part of the hidden curriculum. These hidden ideas or expectations are not formally in the curriculum but are often important for success in many fields, including librarianship. Hidden curriculum is often discussed in how librarians interact with students and patrons, but new librarians and library students must learn the hidden lessons of working in a library. It is impossible to be successful in or change a system if you don't know how it works. So much of the library profession is hidden. I think this contributes to why so many people feel like library school does not prepare them to be a librarian and to go through the hiring process. Library schools have a role to play in exposing the hidden curriculum, but the responsibility to expose, explain, and push back on the hidden curriculum lies with all librarians.

I'm now a seasoned librarian in a permanent teaching faculty position, working on a second master's degree in public policy. When I wrote *Trouble for a New Generation in Librarianship,* I had just started as a temporary Government Documents Librarian at the University of Colorado Boulder. After three years in this position worrying about contract renewal and taking too much so that I could prove my values, a permanent line was approved for this position. I applied for the position and was hired permanently in March of 2020. Literally a week after my official start date Covid happened. To add to this chaos, library leadership decided to push through a planned reorganization during the pandemic which moved me from a liaison focused department to one focused on rare materials. As one might expect, this caused confusion, chaos, and uncertainty in my position and throughout the library.

Luckily, I had had experienced librarians as mentors who guided and still guide me as a librarian. Mentors help explain the hidden curriculum and make professional connections. They help support you when feeling overwhelmed or lost and answer questions about the realities of librarianship. One of the most important factors in my professional success is having mentors. As a graduate student working as a TA at Auraria Library I had fantastic mentors who took time to explain the hiring process, give me chances to try things, and expose the ins and outs of academic library life. As a new librarian at the University of Colorado, I had mentors who brought me to meetings, introduced me to people, and explained the weird quirks of faculty meetings. Without mentorship I would not have made it through this tumult. Exposing the hidden curriculum and ensuring good mentorship doesn't solve all the structural and institutional biases that create barriers to librarianship. This work can help individuals navigate librarianship and the hidden curriculum. It also provides the foundations to tackle many of our intuitional and structural bias by exposing them. It is for this reason that librarians must ensure diverse and equitable access to librarianship. Because this work is so vital for success, we cannot expect those without this access to be successful in our profession.

Final thoughts

The issues I highlighted in *Trouble for a New Generation in Librarianship* continue. Unfortunately, in my experience library leadership does not seem to take these issues seriously. I entered the profession with a lot of hope and a decade later the realities of librarianship often weigh on me. So often I see leadership talk about equity in hiring and providing opportunity, only double down on inequitable practices. And yet, I still have hope for the profession I love. I have seen how much good can come when we provide opportunity. When I was asked to write this reflection, I asked myself what I was trying to say back then and how I lived up to it. My answer is this; we need to advocate for pay and opportunities for library students, we must expose the hidden curriculum of libraries, and we must mentor the next generation. In short, we must be better.

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Essay

Beyond the "New Normal": A Four-Year Reflection on Textbook Access, Affordability, and Open Education Library Services

Michelle Brailey, *University of Alberta*
Sonya Betz, *University of Alberta*

ABSTRACT
This piece looks back on a column we wrote in 2022, reflecting upon our experience during the COVID-19 pandemic called "A Sustainable Way Forward: A Team-based Approach to Tackling Textbook Access and Affordability Issues During the "New Normal." We highlight some of the changes, good and bad, that have emerged following the pandemic, including our institution's growing recognition of the value of reducing the costs of course materials for students alongside the challenges of increasingly restricted access to print textbooks and the broader trend of publishers moving towards flat-fee textbook access fees.

KEYWORDS
Open Education, Course materials, Textbook affordability

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Introduction

In February 2022, we wrote “A Sustainable Way Forward: A Team-based Approach to Tackling Textbook Access and Affordability Issues During the ‘New Normal,’” a column reflecting upon our experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. It considered our institution’s emergency, mid-term move toward online course delivery during the pandemic, and it highlighted deeply ingrained issues in libraries’ relationships with textbook publishers. It also addressed systemic issues regarding affordability of educational materials, and it outlined how our library adapted Open Education services within the context of the rapidly changing pandemic situation. Nearly 5 years later, the pandemic still looms in the rearview mirror. While our Open Educational Resources (OER) program has made significant progress, the systemic issues identified still exist, and we face new complexities presented by the rapid and disruptive growth of generative AI tools in librarianship, teaching, and learning. Our campus has shown growing recognition for the value of cost savings to students, but these gains come alongside the challenges of disappearing access to print textbooks, the broader move of publishers towards “equitable access” textbook programs, and the ever-increasing costs of course materials.

Program Development: Zero Textbook Cost Initiative

Looking back to the original article was a great reflection on how our OER program has developed over a relatively short period. We are happy to report that our OER programs are thriving as the result of a sustained shift toward supporting the adoption of a Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) campus-wide program at the University of Alberta.

ZTC courses are those in which students incur no costs for their class materials. These courses are labelled in the registration system so they can be easily identified by students. The ZTC initiative began as a pilot program in 2021 thanks to the advocacy of the Student’s Union, and it is supported by a partnership between the library, the Students ’Union, and the Office of the Registrar. Additionally, the University of Alberta established a new Coalition for Affordable Course Materials in 2024, bringing together partners from the Library, the Students ’Union, the Dean of Students, the Vice Provost of Teaching and Learning, the Registrar’s Office, and the bookstore to investigate strategies for reducing course materials costs for students.

The University of Alberta was the first large Canadian institution to implement a campus-wide ZTC program, and it quickly became an institutional priority. In 2023, the [University of Alberta’s Student Experience Action Plan] announced a goal to achieve ZTC in 35% of all undergraduate courses by 2026. By winter 2024, around 30% of courses were ZTC. That year, the library embarked on a ZTC Campus Tour to bolster these numbers to meet the 35% goal. The Tour included presentations to 39 different faculties and departments promoting the ZTC initiative and other supporting library services.

The results of this tremendous effort were not what we expected. While ZTC savings have grown, and the University of Alberta Students’ Union estimates that students have saved up to

50 million dollars since the ZTC program began (Almeida, P., & Tamsett, K. 2025). Despite this success the number of courses labelled as ZTC has not grown beyond 30%.

Although it is possible that the ZTC program rapidly reached its saturation point, we do not believe this is the case. Our interactions with instructors during our tour presentations, along with increased collaboration and communication between the ZTC partners, uncovered significant data reporting gaps, which lead to underreporting of the number of courses like ZTC. The Coalition for Affordable Course Materials created a ZTC Working Group in 2025 to resolve some of the data reporting and collection issues, and it ran an instructor survey and focus groups in winter 2026 to better understand the barriers to ZTC adoption. The final report and recommendations of this work are still underway. We are hopeful changes can be made to improve the registration process so we can truly see the impact of ZTC on our campus and better understand how to support instructors in making their courses ZTC.

When it comes to Library support for OE and ZTC, our services have also changed since our 2022 column. Open Education supports that were developed during the early phase of COVID are now folded into our broader ZTC approach. In our last reflection, we had recruited a team of library Information Service Specialists staff to search for OE materials that could be used to support 130 undergraduate courses on campus. Results were shared with subject librarians to communicate to their departments. This project, however, did not continue far from this stage. OER searching has since taken an on-demand approach. Instructors who are curious about ZTC can request that we search for materials that include OER, library subscribed materials that have unlimited concurrent access, and other open access materials as relevant for the subject area.

A further change has been how we support OE publishing, with institutional funding supporting a collaborative hosted model of Pressbooks between 14 post-secondary institutions through an initiative called Open Education Alberta.

Future Challenges

Despite the significant gains made in OE adoption and awareness through the ZTC implementation, our progress faces a major emerging challenge due to the University of Alberta Bookstore's adoption of a flat fee commercial textbook billing program in fall 2026. These so-called "equitable access" programs are not yet widespread in Canada, with the University of Alberta's adoption being promoted by the institution, and provider Follett, as the first of its kind in the country (Follett Higher Education 2026). Despite sustained, multi-year opposition by students and librarians, summarized in a letter of concern drafted and signed by more than 40 librarians (Betz et al. 2026), this program is scheduled to launch in September. We expect the impacts to include an increase in course materials costs for students and a decrease in the adoption of ZTC by instructors, both of which are directly counter to our goals for our Open Education program in the library.

Finally, we cannot draft a reflection on librarianship without considering the role of emerging generative AI technologies. Like all other facets of librarianship, AI is reshaping teaching, learning, and Open Education. These tools are being used to create learning materials, assess and tutor students, and are increasingly ubiquitous in digital learning environments. While the potential of gen AI to support our Open Education program is significant, the ethical implications are vast and complex, and we are watching developments here carefully.

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Essay

De-centering and Re-centering Digital Scholarship, Ten Years On

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ABSTRACT

Ten years after the publication of a manifesto attempting to describe what digital scholarship could do for and within libraries, some of the original authors reflect on the progress of the call-to-action. This article describes areas in which the integration of digital scholarship activities as core parts of librarianship has and has not become commonplace and traces larger-scale developments in the academy and global knowledge landscape that have contributed to the accuracy of the predictions made in 2017.

KEYWORDS

Digital scholarship, functional specialization, core competencies

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AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors used generative AI tools to assist in summarization and refinement of their original ideas and writing. All ideas, citations, and substantive arguments originate with the authors.

Circling Back

Ten years ago, colleagues in the fledgling Office of Digital Research and Scholarship at Florida State University published a call to action attempting to define what "digital scholarship does." In the article, we hoped to coalesce common threads of a broadly and often stubbornly undefined field into our own daily work in librarianship (Moritz et al., 2017). The article was also a dual effort to establish technology-enhanced research as a seed from which ethics of care and openness could grow in librarianship, as well as a way to push back against developments we saw as detrimental to the contemporary academy.

The paper outlined two major goals. First, it challenged the impulse to build distinct and prescriptive digital scholarship centers (including administrative units, job postings, and dedicated spaces), arguing that these effected a detrimental cloistering of practitioners and conversations from the broader academy's scholarly activity. Second, it argued that to sustain digital scholarship support, and to evolve librarianship into something capable of supporting other new and emerging forms of scholarly practice, librarians must make the concerns of digital scholarship practitioners regular and core functions of the library rather than tangential specialties.

As may be suspected, the article was formulated initially as a response to our own institutional environment at the time—lacking robust infrastructure to support digitally inflected work—as much as it was a response to the broader scholarly landscape. It was not intended as a rebuke of digital scholarship centers that existed elsewhere and indeed was inspired by several institutions that had already made incredible progress in developing sustainable infrastructure, ethical labor practices, and challenges to established models. In effect, the article was part wish list and part mission statement, justifying its "manifesto" title.

What actually happened

In the decade since publication, all seven of the original authors have left FSU scattering to different institutions and, in several cases, to careers entirely outside of libraries and higher education. A new team now runs the Office of Digital Research and Scholarship, bringing its own concerns and expertise to bear on the same underlying question of how best to support digitally inflected work. What's more, critical attention to what the digital scholarship (and/or humanities) center was "doing" in the academy received extensive critical investigation shortly after our original publication, earning its own special volume of the seminal Debates in Digital Humanities series in which dozens of authors addressed many of our original concerns (Nieves et al., 2021). Our initial vision for what digital scholarship could affect in librarianship, however, witnessed other continuing radical changes in ways perhaps none of us fully anticipated.

The most significant of those shifts have been political and financial rather than methodological:

- Tenure has narrowed considerably, though largely for reasons that have little to do with digital scholarship specifically. Unrelenting adjunctification and direct attacks on the institution of tenure across the American academic landscape have done far more to reshape promotion and tenure than any argument we made about recognizing digital outputs (Doležal, 2023; Peet, 2022).

• Direct sources of digital and library funding have been decimated. The National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services' Office of Digital Humanities have all faced hostile federal administrations, crippling efforts to build and sustain the infrastructure our original article assumed would keep expanding (Otis, 2023; Witteveen, 2026).

• Indirect sources have likewise been wiped out. Reductions in federal indirect cost recovery rates have quietly undercut library budgets, and ongoing restrictions against publication charges have limited how broadly authors can disseminate their work (Ginexi, 2026). Even in the face of broad-spectrum acceptance of OA publishing pathways, federal funding access mandates, and the growing prevalence of transformative subscription agreements, this has completely restructured the OA publishing landscape from that of 2017 (Bakker et al., 2024).

• The fight against neoliberal valuation of librarian labor has been absorbed into a larger fight. What felt urgent and specific in 2017 has since become one small piece of an existential effort to justify the academy's relevance to an adversarial political climate and an apathetic public (Bradley, 2021).

The global COVID-19 pandemic accelerated many parts of our argument. Flexible, digitally native modes of work, remote access to materials, and multimedia-friendly infrastructure moved from aspirational to commonplace almost overnight in 2020, in ways that would have seemed optimistic when the original article was written. There was something quietly vindicating in watching the case for openness and access become self-evident when physical alternatives disappeared, even if that vindication arrived through crisis rather than persuasion.

And yet, in spite of all of this, the shape of the work looks remarkably familiar today as it did in 2017. Digital scholarship librarian positions are still regularly posted and often deal with the same questions of supporting digital publication, digital methods across disciplines, and technology literacy. Standalone digital scholarship centers still exist on many campuses (and are newly established with some regularity) even if they are named something more akin to “laboratories” or “hubs” these days. They are usually still staffed by small and overstretched teams. In niche academic communities, such as law, dental, and medical schools, research faculty continue to rely on the main campus for staff and technology support related to digital scholarship, furthering the specialization silos that make producing interdisciplinary scholarship more difficult. Digital scholarship as a discipline still encompasses practitioners from varied disciplines and fosters active practitionership that does not depend on any particular skill level to participate meaningfully. It still embraces a radically wide definition of who can contribute, and what a “contribution” looks like. However, many of the digital methodologies that fit under the big tent of digital scholarship have now become commonplace in disciplinary methodologies, and new generations of scholars are becoming expert and even self-sufficient in these modes of work as a core and regular part of their own specialization.

Perhaps the most unforeseen addition, supporting a bevy of radical AI literacies and competencies, may in fact have been identifiable to those who were already grappling with machine learning and computer vision approaches in humanities scholarship back in 2017, even if none of us named it as clearly as we should have.

Revisiting the Theses

Though attempting to presage the future is often fraught, several of the original theses held up reasonably well against the intervening decade:

- "Digital Scholarship builds communities." Digital scholarship still cuts across disciplinary and institutional hierarchies, and still resists the single-author, single-PI model that the rest of the academy defaults to by habit.

- "Digital Scholarship breaks down disciplinary silos." Liaison work has shifted from an exclusively subject-based model toward a more broadly functional one that has become largely conversant with digital research methods which crept into graduate methodology classes. This has often had the practical effect of increasing the workload on both subject and explicitly functional liaisons rather than relief for either. More work needs to be done within universities to bring research faculty together with digital scholarship specialists, but one mark of success is that more research faculty are aware of these issues today than ever before.

Other theses were overtaken by forces well beyond the scope of what our article, or our field, could have addressed alone, or even foreseen:

- "Digital Scholarship redefines the norms of promotion and tenure." As mentioned above, this assumed tenure itself would remain a stable enough institution to modify in the first place rather than an object in aspirational survival (Taylor & Watts, 2025). Even so, standards and review processes remain difficult to meaningfully change for certain disciplines, and appropriate credit for innovative research outputs distinct from traditional journal article or monograph outputs remains aspirational. There is progress around the edges and in specific subjects, but more work remains to bridge this gap.

- "Digital Scholarship redefines the relationship between research and teaching." The hope that an adoption of Open Educational Resources as a normal output of research practice would resolve the textbook affordability crisis did not anticipate that crisis being absorbed into a much larger and more punishing college affordability crisis, compounded by enrollment decline, or various global economic upheavals that have resulted in existential threats to entire departments (Friedman, 2024; Moody, 2026). However, integration between research and pedagogy has seen uneven acceptance across the academy - Law being a prime example.

- "Digital Scholarship reorients the role of the academy." Attention to community engagement has grown across higher education, but access to information was never really the barrier standing between universities and the communities around them. That remains a trust problem with a long and complicated history, not an infrastructure problem, and no amount of openness was ever going to resolve it on its own (Rosenblum et al., 2024).

What none of us anticipated in 2017, though, is that artificial intelligence would come to supplant digital scholarship in roughly the same contested, poorly defined, and unevenly distributed position within libraries. AI responsibility shows up in job descriptions without a clear boundary, is layered unevenly atop existing roles, and has begun reshaping what practitioners mean when they talk about supporting scholarly work in ways that echo our own field's earliest growing pains almost precisely. Perhaps AI, too, will find a comfortable home suffused throughout academic practice a decade hence.

Conclusion: More Transformative Than We Thought, Just Not on Schedule

When we wrote the original manifesto, we believed digital scholarship would eventually either succeed in becoming fully central to librarianship or fail integration and remain permanently cloistered at its margins. A decade later, neither outcome describes what actually happened. Digital scholarship's real legacy has turned out to be more diffuse, and in many ways more transformative, than either version of the future we imagined in 2017. It did not conquer the library, nor did it not stay confined to a center, either. Instead, it quietly suffused outward into functional roles, public-facing communication work, and skill sets that now move comfortably between academia, government, and industry in ways that would have been difficult to picture a decade ago. The core skills of digital scholarship also became more commonly incorporated into graduate curricula, and the constant generational treadmill of new faculty hires and retirements have changed the overall landscape of expected support from libraries and provided skills from researchers themselves.

The opportunity we described in 2017 was real, and in a meaningful sense it has been realized, though rarely within the institutional walls we assumed it would require. Recognizing this success is perhaps difficult when faced with the extant realities of the current academic landscape, but it is important to acknowledge. The challenges we failed to anticipate—the collapse of tenure, the evisceration of federal funding, and the disruptive arrival of artificial intelligence—have mattered more than the ones we spent the most energy arguing about. Digital scholarship, it turns out, was never really about centers or job titles in the first place. It was always a question of whether the underlying skills and ethics we were describing could survive sustained contact with an academy under siege. Ten years on, they have, even if they have survived to exist in an academy that looks quite different from the one that first gave them a home.

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Essay

Innovation During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Activating Student Employees for ETD 508 Remediation in a Remote Work Environment

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ABSTRACT

In 2020 our library launched a project to train student assistants to remediate inaccessible Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs) during the COVID-19 pandemic. We revisit that original project to reflect on how it has evolved into an established program and policy. We describe the organizational changes since then, including staff turnover, refined documentation, and a return to a smaller, on-site student workforce. We discuss how a closer partnership with our campus Office of Graduate Studies has increased the number of accessible submissions we receive, through shared training modules and required accessibility checks. Furthermore, we trace the transitions our repository has undergone, from DSpace to ProQuest ETD Administrator and Esploro, and the shifting landscape of accessibility tools we use. Finally, we consider how new ADA Title II regulations and growing campus investment are opening opportunities for improvement, requiring flexibility in our workflows.

KEYWORDS

Accessibility; electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs); academic libraries

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Introduction

It is humbling to revisit this article and see how that early project has transformed into an established program and policy. Since "Innovation during the COVID-19 pandemic: Activating student employees for ETD 508 remediation in a remote work environment" was published, like many, our library has been in a near constant state of flux. The intervening years have seen return to work orders and implementation of more flexible work schedules; the original authors have moved on to other positions within and outside of the library; all the student assistants who originally participated have graduated; new staff were hired and began overseeing Electronic Thesis and Dissertation (ETD) accessibility work; and constant changes to our technical infrastructure have necessitated regular changes to our workflows.

Accessibility Post-Pandemic

Organizational infrastructure

Many positives developed from the original project (February 2020–July 2021), and reflecting on our initial foray into the world of accessibility remediation demonstrates how much progress we've made, even if it sometimes feels like we are going in circles. To date, the University Library at Sacramento State has been able to retain institutional support to remediate incoming ETD submissions that do not meet accessibility requirements, which in and of itself is a success in this era of budget austerity. During the pandemic, the library employed an average of 29 student assistants working remotely. Currently there are four working on-site, including one dedicated student assistant working approximately ten hours per week, and another student assistant in the same department who contributes during their downtime. Two students from the Sacramento State Information Resources & Technology (IRT) department work on ETD remediation as well. As previously mentioned, Elyse Fox moved to a different department and became the Digital Collections Librarian (though is still much engrained in accessibility work), and Ariell Lomax was hired to fill the staff position overseeing ongoing ETD accessibility. Thanks in large part to robust documentation created during and after the initial project, Lomax quickly picked it up and has since revised and converted the student assistant training manual into a Canvas course format with practice materials in addition to overseeing the ETD Accessibility LibGuide. Currently, student assistants predominately remediate born-digital ETDs rather than scanned PDFs, unless there is a thesis digitization request. With the current staffing levels described, the library has been able to keep up with the incoming ETD submissions that do not meet accessibility requirements, which is only approximately 10 out of an average of 100 total submissions per semester.

Campus partnership

The student assistant partnership with IRT was one of the positive outcomes of establishing a new campus relationship during this original project. The library has additionally developed better working relationships with the Office of Graduate Studies (OGS), which has helped to significantly increase the amount of accessible ETD submissions received. Through this project, the library was able to get a much better understanding of OGS department workflows and policies and assess their level of competency with regards to accessibility practices. To support OGS and student assistants, our Accessibility LibGuide[1] was enhanced with more detailed guidelines on making works accessible. Accessibility guidelines were originally only created for Microsoft Office Word documents, but it became clear that more students were creating, editing, and finalizing their documents in Google suite before downloading their PDF for submission.

As OGS uses Canvas learning management system for students' orientation, review, and submission workflow, the library was able to incorporate into the OGS Canvas course a previously created course module on creating accessible files. OGS also began requiring students to validate their documents using the Word accessibility checker prior to submitting them online, which has greatly increased the number of accessible documents that are submitted to the library. Finally, in Fall 2024, the library reviewed the Word document templates that OGS makes available to students to be formatted for accessibility. However, these templates are not mandatory and thus only useful if a student uses the template, which can't be tracked sufficiently.

This closer partnership with OGS was also fortuitous as throughout the initial project, the library was simultaneously transitioning the ETD submission platform from DSpace to ProQuest ETD Administrator (PQETDAdmin). Our campus has a mediated deposit policy, so OGS must approve ETDs before they are remediated and published through the library. This transition to a new system benefited from the existing partnership, as collaboration was essential in the development of the deposit form to ensure that OGS's workflows could be translated to the new system. As the library oversees PQETDAdmin and the institutional repository, the library continues to provide training and troubleshooting support now that the site is live.

Technology

The transition to PQETDAdmin came on the heels of our migration from DSpace as our institutional repository to ExLibris' Esploro. Considerations for integration included ensuring that files could still be reviewed for accessibility in an efficient way, and that metadata from PQETDAdmin was ingested and mapped to Esploro in the platform-specific fields. While this was labor-intensive to set up, the transition has allowed for better integration of accessibility guidelines and documentation into the student submission workflow. Namely, PQETDAdmin

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[1] University Library, California State University, Sacramento. "Creating Accessible Documents," Sac State Library Research Guides, https://csus.libguides.com/accessibility

allows for customization of the deposit interface which enables us to reference accessibility guidelines prior to submission.[2] Prior to this ability, communicating accessibility guidelines and providing resources to students was not uniform and often overlooked by students. Ultimately, this has resulted in a major improvement in the number of incoming submissions that meet our accessibility requirements. In addition to these major changes to infrastructure, the actual remediation workflow has undergone several iterations because of changes to and access to new accessibility applications. Many of these new tools have become available in recent years as part of the California State University (CSU)'s Accessible Technology Initiative[3]. For example, the original workflow relied on performing an initial accessibility check in Canvas using the [AL1.1] Ally tool and performing remediation tasks on inaccessible files using Adobe Acrobat. The library was also able to acquire several licenses to ABBYY FineReader. While Ally didn't have remediation capabilities, it was a useful tool but has since been replaced with UDOIT by Cidi Labs. While UDOIT is provided for free by the CSU Chancellor's Office, PDF Validate better fits the needs of our existing workflow. The library recently received a temporary license to SiteImprove's PDF Validate tool, which we found to be more complementary to our specific accessibility needs while giving detailed reports and feedback. Unfortunately, that license expired in June 2026 and, at the time of this writing, is still being vetted at the campus-level along with other accessibility tools.

Future considerations

The intervening years since this initial project commenced have seen changes at every level, requiring nearly constant adjustments. When this project was initiated, accessibility remediation was frankly challenging to advocate for. Since then, due in large part to the updated American Disabilities Act (ADA) Title II regulations, the number of resources, products, and support for accessibility across the CSU have steadily increased as deadlines for compliance loom. This university-wide commitment to accessibility provides more opportunities to explore new technologies and develop more efficient workflows, though exploration is also limited to what products are adopted by the CSU. In addition, as artificial intelligence continues to be incorporated into our existing platforms and applications, we hope that these integrations will enhance accessibility features and functionality. What these authors can be certain of is that we enhance accessibility features and functionality. What these authors can be certain of is that we won't allow ourselves to get too comfortable!

[2] California State University, Sacramento. "Resources and Guidelines." *ProQuest ETD Administrator,* https://www.etdadmin.com/main/resources?siteId=1053. Accessed 30 July 2026.

[3] California State University Accessible Technology Initiative, https://ati.calstate.edu/

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Book Review

Review of *Organize Your Library! Developing the Collective Power of Library Workers*

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ABSTRACT

Review of *Organize your library! Developing the collective power of library workers*, by Angelo Moreno, Kelly McElroy, Meredith Kahn, and Emily Drabinski. ALA Neal Schuman, 2025. 136 pp. ISBN 979-8-89255-522-7.

KEYWORDS

Unions in libraries; union organization

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Organize your library: Developing the collective power of library workers is part of the *Critical Cultural Information Studies* book series. This series aims to "help advance the library field's discussions and understanding of often difficult issues, such as structural racism, equity, sexuality, disability, oppression, privilege, power, intersectionality, and inclusion and belonging.

Organize your library: Developing the collective power of library workers is how-to book. It tells the stories of those who have started their own unions, negotiated contacts, and bargained for the common good of their communities." The book is well organized, starting with an introductory definition of what unions are and why they might be needed. Chapter 2 describes how to start a union, depending on state law, followed by a chapter on the uniqueness of library workers and why unionizing can benefit them. Specific experiences from librarians and library workers in both public and academic libraries are explained, including how the decision was made to unionize and how the union benefited the workers within the given library.

The first of four authors, Angelo Moreno came to libraries after exploring other career paths and with a strong sense of justice in the workplace. He took a job at a public library in Michigan and became involved in unionizing the library, resulting in elevated pay for hourly and public-facing library workers. Emily Drabinski is an academic librarian at a university in Brooklyn with a rich history of unionization. Her salary increased significantly when she joined the faculty because of the influence of unions on salaries for library workers. Kelly McElroy is an academic librarian in Oregon, and her university has an American Association of University Professors chapter. Faculty at the university had a significant seat at the table when the administration proposed cuts during the COVID pandemic. Meredith Kahn is an academic librarian in Michigan. She believes that "the most effective strategy for building our collective power as the library workers—for the good of our profession, its institutions, and our patrons—is unionization."

The greatest strength of the book is its readable style and easy-to-follow organization. Many examples of situations that led to workers organizing are given, including starting a chapter of an existing union, starting a union for library workers from scratch, and organizing with an existing local workers union outside of the library field. The authors also include descriptions of how unions help library workers who are already part of a union. There are chapters on conducting campaigns to unionize, negotiating contracts, and dealing with your boss in a unionized library environment. I found it encouraging that all four authors are familiar with unionized libraries, either having played a part in starting a union or having benefited from joining a library with an established union.

Being a professional librarian with very little knowledge of unions, I found the beginning chapters of the book fascinating. They explain the purpose of unions, how they can benefit workers, and how to start one. The chapter on negotiating contracts provides solid information on working with management or administration on union contracts. Many chapters include action plans to help library workers take the next steps towards organizing. Chapters include additional readings for more information. Chapters on understanding the inner workings of union protocol are not as clear as earlier chapters that discuss the steps of unionizing. However, Chapter 4, “What Makes Library Workers Different?” was particularly relatable. Librarians can spend much of their professional lives explaining why we are slightly different than other workers in our pay grade or classification. As a university faculty librarian, I am very aware of the differences between teaching faculty and library faculty and spend time advocating for equal opportunities for library faculty. This chapter struck a chord with my own professional library experiences, and I understand the value of unionization in that context. Chapter 8, “Our Vision for the Future,” stresses that “library worker unions contribute to better library services for the community.” It stands to reason that librarians and other library workers who enjoy fair compensation and have agency in their libraries are more effective in their jobs. I think a librarian finding themselves in a unionized library would benefit greatly from the information included in these later chapters.

This book fills a much-needed niche for people who work in and lead libraries. As the notes on the book series state, the purpose of the *Critical Cultural Information Studies* series is to “help advance the library field’s discussions and understanding of often difficult issues.” Understanding how unions could impact the work life of people who work in libraries could broaden the opportunities offered to librarians and other library workers. With this book, people can educate themselves on the possibilities of making their work situation a better one.