
The Model Land-Grant Library at Ohio State

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Central to fulfilling the promise of the nation’s public land-grant universities, often described as “the people’s universities,” is an active, progressive commitment to the core missions that drove their founding and subsequent development: broadened access to affordable higher education and the dissemination of research for community benefit. An essential element enabling the teaching, research, and public outreach missions that motivate land-grant universities is the academic research library, the entity entrusted with providing the information services needed to educate an ever-changing student body and fuel knowledge creation across the academic disciplines, as they respond to the challenges that confront local communities and the wider society and culture.

The most successful libraries are those that strive to effectively align with and integrate their efforts into the priorities and activities of their parent institutions. Within the land-grant context, success for a library should be measured not only by traditional markers of quality, such as collection size, but by how well it advances core land-grant values and missions as expressed through initiatives guided by university-level priorities. Land-grant academic research libraries are not in the “library” business in isolation; rather, they exist to further the objectives of their sponsoring institutions and, in doing so, must continuously adjust and transform as the tools and methods for realizing teaching, research, and outreach missions evolve.

The Ohio State University Libraries aspires to be the leading library elevating the values and missions of a flagship public land-grant university. As its overarching mission, the Libraries “promotes innovative research and creative expression, advances effective teaching, curates and preserves information essential for scholarship and learning at Ohio State, and shares knowledge and culture with the people of Ohio, the nation, and the world” (The Ohio State University University Libraries 2018). This work requires purposeful alignment with the university’s strategic priorities and deep integration with institutional activities that support enterprise-level goals and objectives. For the University Libraries, the lion’s share of this work is framed within three broadly conceived areas of endeavor:

- Equipping students for lifelong success
- Empowering knowledge creators
- Engaging for broader impact

The initiatives and projects upholding these thematic pillars are reinforced by activities focused on the iterative, ongoing development of the organization and the faculty, staff, and student employees who sustain it. All of this is done with the goals of increasing efficacy and shaping innovative approaches for meeting the institution’s educational, research, and outreach objectives—to model the activities of a modern, agile, and effectual academic research library and how it should operate for maximum impact.

Equipping Students for Lifelong Success

To activate the university’s broad student success agenda, the Libraries strives to promote equitable learning outcomes through the support of transformational teaching in the classroom and progressive services furthering student learning and college affordability. Activities sustaining student success begin with the Libraries’ long-standing commitment to the university’s First Year Experience and Second-Year Transformational Experience Program initiatives, both aimed at raising retention and completion rates by enhancing the student experience for early career undergraduates. The Libraries also partners with the Office of Undergraduate Research each year to fund multiple undergraduate research fellowships designed to expose students to how scholarship is created, communicated,

and disseminated through work with library collections and with guidance from librarian mentors.

The Libraries' support for teaching and learning effectiveness includes a strategic partnership with the University Institute for Teaching and Learning, the campus body charged with enriching teaching and improving the learning experience for students at Ohio State. This maturing partnership entails locating the institute within Thompson Library, the iconic main library facility on the Oval—the heart of campus—as well as a growing slate of co-investments in teaching enrichment. These involve the creation of several teaching-enhancement trainings designed and taught by Ohio State librarians, including a self-paced, interactive online workshop that prepares instructors to purposefully integrate information literacy and critical thinking concepts into their courses, and a five-part workshop series that introduces instructors to equitable and inclusive pedagogical practices for incorporating information literacy and critical inquiry into research and writing assignments.

The Libraries is also focused on advancing twenty-first-century literacies to help better prepare students for a rapidly changing society, including boosting competencies in using data and evaluating media with cross-cultural and ethical fluency. A highlight in this area is the Designing for Meaningful Inquiry grant program, created, in partnership with the Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing, to incentivize instructors to design or revise course assignments with the goal of expanding information literacy and critical reading skills by engaging students' identities and interests through well-constructed research-based writing assignments.

To further the university's aggressive affordability agenda, the Libraries invests as a strategic partner in the Affordable Learning Exchange (ALX), an initiative designed to encourage and assist faculty in reducing the overall cost of a college education by lowering the cost of course materials. ALX partners, led by the Office of Distance Education and eLearning, work with instructors to cut costs for students utilizing a “one size does *not* fit all” approach. With an emphasis on maintaining or improving the student learning experience, solutions range from the adoption of lower-cost textbooks to free open educational resources, which can include materials accessible from Ohio State's library collections to content authored by the instructor to online readings found in the public domain.

Librarians from Ohio State also participate in the Ohio Open Ed Collaborative, a statewide effort to reduce the cost of textbooks and other

course materials for students through the development of open educational resources. Working on project teams with faculty from across the state, Ohio State librarians have contributed to the creation of course content in various disciplines, most significantly in mathematics, as well as serving on the planning and assessment teams for the initiative. These and related initiatives have resulted in millions of dollars of savings for students—savings that will only increase as additional courses transition to more affordable options in the coming years.

Empowering Knowledge Creators

The Libraries catalyzes innovative research and creative expression at Ohio State by fostering, preserving, and sharing knowledge and scholarship. Librarians and curators build robust collections—world-class in some areas—to support both research and teaching. Areas of particular strength include the Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute performing arts collections; the Hilandar Research Library, the largest collection of medieval Slavic manuscripts on microform in the world; the distinctive collections housed in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, which includes the renowned William Charvat Collection of American Fiction; and the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum, the world's largest collection of materials related to cartoons and comics. In addition to the University Archives, which serves as the official memory of Ohio State, having collected more than 30,000 linear feet of manuscript material and more than two million photographs documenting Buckeye history, the Libraries houses the Byrd Polar Archives, chronicling the history of polar exploration, and the Ohio Congressional Archives, anchored by the archives of Ohio politician and astronaut John Glenn. The Libraries also holds significant international collections supporting Chinese and Korean, East European and Slavic, Japanese, Jewish, Latin American, and Middle Eastern studies.

Though the collection of scholarly and cultural heritage materials is critical for future research, employing new methods to acquire, preserve, and ultimately use collections is equally important for bolstering new, emerging research and educational methodologies across the scholarly disciplines. Complicating the playing field, the explosion of available published and archival information over the last quarter century, driven by the rapid adoption of computer, network, and media technologies, has, by necessity, pushed academic libraries into collaborative relationships

with the goal of utilizing collective scale to build and provide access to collections.

For Ohio State, the Libraries maintains long-standing strategic partnerships for volume purchasing at the state and regional levels through OhioLINK and the Big Ten Academic Alliance (BTAA), which have resulted in the twin goods of vastly expanded content (articles, e-books, digitized archives, etc.) at greatly discounted costs owing to volume pricing. These same economies of scale are used to drive down costs through the relatively seamless sharing of books and other resources across OhioLINK and BTAA partners, reducing the need for member colleges and universities to purchase lesser-used materials or duplicate copies to fill short-term needs. Ohio State, stewarding the largest overall collection within Ohio and one of the largest within the BTAA, is currently the sixth largest lender of books and other materials within the global resource-sharing network. Through these collaborative endeavors, among others, the Libraries ensures that scholars around the world have access to Ohio State's collections, and in return, Ohio State faculty and students have access to hundreds of millions of books and other important research materials not held locally.

Similarly, the Libraries leverages multiple strategic partnerships to better and more efficiently store and preserve both print and electronic collections. Within Ohio, the Libraries operates the largest and busiest high-density storage and preservation facility within the statewide print repository network. Looking toward a future where the use of electronic books and other texts grows and the use of print continues to diminish, the Libraries is planning a program to secure and preserve unique copies of books with research value from across the state, the Ohio Last Copy Project, as partner colleges and universities look to de-emphasize lesser-used print collections and recapture space for other uses on their campuses. At the regional level, the Libraries is an active participant in the BTAA Shared Print Repository initiative, in which partners co-fund and maintain a shared collection of print journal backfile volumes, obviating the need for all to store duplicative content on each campus and freeing space in local facilities.

As usage of electronic content continues to surge, the Libraries looks to exploit economies found in building and utilizing shared infrastructures to store, preserve, and access digital books and other content. For instance, the Libraries is a member of the HathiTrust Digital Library, a digital preservation repository and access platform on which members

store and provide access to books and other materials digitized locally and through large-scale efforts, such as the Google Books Library Project. As an OhioLINK partner, the Libraries also utilizes the Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Center platform to preserve and access all of the undergraduate and master's theses and doctoral dissertations produced at Ohio State. Both are examples of the Libraries partnering in collective efforts to deliver higher quality and more cost-effective solutions than isolated and duplicative local efforts could afford.

Apart from the provision and management of collections, the Libraries actively promotes knowledge creation through the Research Commons, both a space and a suite of services that scaffolds faculty and students in the learning and application of emerging, often computationally driven, methods and tools in their research. Created in partnership with the university's offices of Research and the Chief Information Officer, among others, the Research Commons offers expert assistance in finding, managing, and visualizing data; geographic information systems; digital humanities; and measuring research impact in a dynamic physical environment designed to nurture and celebrate collaborative, multidisciplinary work.

The Libraries' Copyright Services unit provides the Ohio State scholarly community expert guidance on the application of copyright law to facilitate teaching, research, and scholarship. This work entails consultations on everything from registering copyrights to navigating the use of copyrighted material for teaching to the intellectual property considerations involved in publishing research results. All of this is buttressed by a team of dedicated, subject specialist librarians—each expert in navigating the literature and research practices of their academic discipline—working diligently to ensure that the information necessary to fuel research and teaching is available and accessible to faculty and students.

The publishing of research results within the scholarly literature in many ways drives the academy, and the Libraries' Publishing Program works with faculty and students to publish their scholarly work in a variety of formats, with an emphasis on broadening free or low-cost publication as an alternative to more expensive commercial options. With the goal of promoting open access to Ohio State scholarship, the Libraries offers publishing and hosting services for academic journals and conference proceedings, as well as assistance to faculty who wish to teach academic publishing to their students through hands-on experience with writing, peer review, editing, and publication design. Projects range from

publishing and hosting partnerships with journals such as *Disability Studies Quarterly* and *Empirical Musicology Review* to “new model” interactive, multimedia ventures like *Latinx Talk*.

As the costs of commercial scholarly publishing continue to rise, the Libraries participates in collaborative projects at the regional and national levels intended to disrupt untenable business practices and build more sustainable models for scholarly publishing. The Libraries is a leader in efforts within the BTAA and OhioLINK to change the business relationships between commercial scholarly publishers and university customers from one of ever-increasing subscription costs for content held behind paywalls to a model that funds the open access publication and reading of journal articles under more predictable and sustainable pricing structures. Relatedly, the Libraries invests in a series of initiatives, along with several partners within the Association of Research Libraries, to incentivize academic journals to move from high-cost commercial publishers to platforms owned or controlled by academic institutions, with the goals of reducing or eliminating subscription costs, providing open access to scholarship, and maintaining intellectual property for authors.

The Libraries also participates in the *TOME (Toward an Open Monograph Ecosystem)* initiative, a partnership between the American Association of Universities, the Association of Research Libraries, and the Association of University Presses, which seeks to broaden the dissemination of scholarship in the humanities and humanistic social sciences through the publication of digital open access editions of peer-reviewed and professionally edited monographs. Through *TOME*, the Libraries is investing \$250,000 over five years to support Ohio State faculty members in publishing digital open access books that will be freely accessible worldwide for teaching, learning, and future research.

Engaging for Broader Impact

A defining feature of land-grant universities is their outreach to and engagement with the communities they serve. For the libraries at Ohio State, this manifests in the pursuit of initiatives aligned with university priorities that promote a more connected and better-informed society within Ohio and beyond. This work is often propelled by dynamic cross-campus and external partnerships, taking many different forms, that enable impact much greater than any one entity could deliver.

In this vein, the Libraries partners with multiple community-based organizations to aid underserved and at-risk communities throughout Central Ohio. These include an ongoing relationship with the Mid-Ohio Foodbank, an organization that helps over 500,000 people each year who struggle with food insecurity, for which Libraries' faculty and staff provide assistance through numerous volunteer and fund-raising projects. The Libraries also contributes ongoing support for Project Mentor, a mentoring program for primary and middle school students facilitated by Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Central Ohio. Through this program, Libraries faculty and staff present a positive role model and a caring ear to vulnerable children grappling with difficult academic, interpersonal, and home life issues.

Similarly, the Libraries advances an ongoing partnership with the Expanding Visions Foundation, a Columbus-based nonprofit that works with at-risk youth to provide career development and leadership training. Through this partnership, students from local high schools come to Ohio State to take part in a career institute designed to cultivate work and life skills while exposing them to a college campus, often for the first time. After completing the institute, students are encouraged to apply for a paid summer internship at the Libraries, working alongside professionals, receiving additional mentorship, and learning what work life is really like. The internship program is proving highly successful, resulting in several returning interns and some future Buckeyes, as students realize that attending college is achievable and Ohio State is home.

Through a robust calendar of public programming, including a wide range of exhibitions with accompanying speakers and panels, the Libraries promotes vigorous dialog on issues important to society. The Libraries' exhibition program aims to spur public engagement with thought-provoking topics reflected through professionally curated exhibits of materials from Ohio State's collections. Recent standout examples include *Front Line: Editorial Cartoonists and the First Amendment* and *Looking Forward, Looking Backward: U. S. Immigration in Cartoons and Comics* at the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum, and *Creative Responses to the Cold War* at the Thompson Library Gallery. Another highlight was the Libraries' participation in the citywide, yearlong celebration of Columbus native son James Thurber with local partners, including Thurber House and the Columbus Museum of Art in 2019. *Thurber's Columbus*, an exhibition focusing on his early years and pulling extensively from Ohio State's impressive collection of Thurber drawings, documented how

his hometown shaped his imagination and offered a source of inspiration throughout his career.

Modeling Excellence

The people who embody the University Libraries, its faculty and staff, live a set of “land-grant” values in all that they do. Those values—discovery, connection, equity, integrity, and stewardship—permeate decision-making about what the organization will do and how it will allocate and deploy its effort. To fully meet its aspirations to be the model library serving a land-grant institution, the Libraries has set out a bold program, guided by these values, to prepare the organization and the people who compose it to operate and work differently.

Through extensive workforce development and organizational learning investments designed to build and strengthen a culture of leadership, risk-taking, and accountability, the Libraries strives to increase its strategic and operational effectiveness by developing the full potential of its faculty, staff, and student employees. A new agile planning and operations framework has been implemented that aims to facilitate an iterative, ongoing organizational conversation about the Libraries’ strategic intent and how it will prioritize resources and effort to achieve its objectives. This ambitious new approach seeks to enable enhanced flexibility and responsiveness to unforeseen opportunities, as well as to effectively measure and communicate the Libraries’ impact on fulfilling the university’s land-grant missions and, ultimately, its promise as the people’s university.

References

The Ohio State University University Libraries. 2018. “Strategic Directions.” <https://library.osu.edu/strategic-directions>.