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*Penny Hecker, Southeastern Louisiana University*



Published by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *A Librarian's Toolbox: What You Need to Know*, is a slim anthology volume covering some current issues of academic librarianship through a collection of *Chronicle* articles and essays spanning 2019 to 2024. The articles and essays are divided into four sections: Section 1 "Evolving for the Future;" Section 2 "Facilities and Services"; Section 3 "The Open Movement;" Section Four "Strategic Significance." Across the sections, it's a total of 14 articles that include three commentaries and a forum transcript.

### **Section 1 "Evolving for the Future"**

**"Academic Libraries Led Universities into the Socially Distant Era. Now They're Planning for What's Next" by Scott Carlson (2021)**

This article discusses how some academic libraries reacted skillfully and constructively in the COVID era to continue their services to users. For example, the librarians and staff at Davidson College Library (North Carolina) were able to digitize many physical functions such as book-retrieval and contactless book pick-up services, and self-checkout that even allowed people to check out books using their phones from anywhere

in the library.

Although librarians have offered vital virtual services well before COVID, the pandemic was "an experiment in accelerating those services without planning and under duress," says Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe, who in 2021 was Professor and Coordinator of Information-Literacy Services at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library. Other things discussed are analog services versus virtual services, and the convenience of virtual services as compared to the lack of face-to-face help with resources. The article wraps up with how physical libraries have come to be viewed as more of an active campus hub, superior to internet chat rooms, rather than a repository of resources.

**"The Future of Campus Libraries? 'Sticky Interdependence'" by Lindsay Ellis (2019)**

The Association of College and Research Libraries conducted a survey in 2016 revealing that 60 percent of libraries had flat budgets for the previous five years and 19 percent experienced decreased funding. In light of this, librarians at universities in the Big Ten Academic Alliance (BTAA), related to the Big Ten Athletic Alliance, decided to work toward offering their collections among one another as though they were "a single, shared one." The article notes how a similar resource sharing project was created about a decade ago between Cornell and Columbia Universities specifically for their Slavic collections.

What would this network be like for the BTAA? If a professor was interested in a text not available at their home institution, ideally this professor could request the text from the BTAA infrastructure and it would be handled similarly to interlibrary loan. It's a break from the attitude of independent libraries motivated by self-interest and not often sharing collections or "the competition to acquire, acquire, acquire." Overall, it's an effort to

reduce spending, curate more carefully, and share collections.

**"Commentary: The Librarians Are Not OK" by Joshua Dolezal (2023)**

The commentary "The Librarians Are Not OK," explores how some academic librarians are losing tenure status in the United States. Given how Louisiana State University in 2024 decided not to hire new librarians in tenure-track positions, this reviewer (tenured librarian at another institution) empathized with the predicaments of librarians losing tenure as discussed in this article. Dolezal begins with how Texas A&M's librarians were essentially, in the words of their president, reduced to a "service unit," by doing away with tenure for librarians. Librarians were given the choice of staying on as staff or retain tenure by moving to another academic department after vacating their library positions. Understandably, the librarians experienced this process as a "collective trauma." Dolezal asks the question, "Why is it that academic librarians are rarely viewed by their faculty colleagues as experts, collaborators, and equals?"

Contrast Texas A&M with California's Sonoma State University where librarians have had faculty status since the early 1970s. However, one of the Sonoma State University librarians noted that even as they enjoy faculty status, "Ignorance about library expertise among disciplinary faculty members can complicate the tenure process for librarians." The well-known librarian, Fobazi Ettarh, closed out the commentary with, "Libraries are just buildings. It is the people who do the work. And we need to treat these people well."

**"'Libraries Are the Great Equalizers': Librarians Sound Off on How Their Jobs and Institutions Are Changing" by Scott Carlson (2022)**

Various academic librarians were queried about the following: What do you see as the value of libraries, and what do they need to do to stay relevant? What do you think about diversity in librarianship over all? Why does the profession struggle to attract a more diverse work force? The article also includes librarians discussing their thoughts about being a second-career librarian, about librarians and data mining, and about being a librarian with a PhD.

Junior Tidal, Associate Professor and Web-services and Multimedia Librarian at New York City of Technology, City University of New York, discussing relevance said, "I believe libraries are one of the last standing institutions that are part of the public good. Nowhere else can you go and just exist without the obligation of consuming or purchasing something. Unfortunately, libraries, both academic and public, are severely underfunded, yet are expected to solve many of society's ills. Librarians and library workers are expected to go beyond their job duties, from social work and administering Narcan to Covid testing."

## **Section 2 "Facilities and Services"**

### **"Colleges Need to Protect Valuable Collections from Climate Change. A New Project Aims to Help" by Calli McMurray (2023)**

This article describes various attempts at protecting collections from environmental damage. Disasters affect libraries in a variety of ways from storm flooding to broken pipes that happen during severe freezes, as well as hot and dry environments where paper cracks and shrinks. The damage can range from smaller but universal threats such as temperature and humidity issues to huge threats such as natural disasters. The new project mentioned in the article title to help save collections is the PROTECCT-GLAM

project to assess climate risk for galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (GLAMS). It's a joint partnership of Louisiana State University, Arizona State University, and GLAM professionals.

**"Advice: How Data Improved Our Library Space" by Cybril Oberlander, Benjamin Miller, Eric Mott, and others (2019)**

Authored by a Humboldt State University Library Dean, two students, and their former supervisor of Special Projects, this brief article discusses how they used data to renovate and improve their seating use. The authors walked around their library to figure out what spaces were low-use or high-use by conducting a seating study. They analyzed the data they gathered and targeted low-use areas for redesign. For example, when they replaced couches from their library cafe with bistro tables, they saw the usage pick up. Although students will often say they want more group-study rooms, interestingly, the group study rooms were not used much, on average, so this finding is inconsistent with what students say they want. In addition to the seating studies, students were asked questions and focus groups also provided data. They even designed software called SpaceUse allowing them to gather data about seating and types of use with a touchscreen device. The takeaway is that their hard work increased library use by 15 percent from 2015 to 2018. Their final advice is that to ensure libraries remain the heart of the campus take the time to learn how students actually use the space, rather than reacting to what students say they want.

**"How Libraries Can Meet the Extracurricular Needs of Community College Students" by Kathryn Palmer (2019)**

The needs of community college students are covered in this article. The nonprofit group Ithaka S+R surveyed seven community colleges and discovered that students sought knowledge and mastery of a subject, making more money, and nailing down a new career. To address their needs, prototypes such as child-care options, long-term technology loans, and personal-librarian services were created. The personal-librarian program targets entry level students with lower-than-average high school grades. The targeted students connect with one personal-librarian who may do everything from academic advising to introducing a student to the social worker who runs the campus food pantry.

Rather than try to make information professionals into social workers, Dr. Braddlee (who uses only one name), an author of the report and Dean of Learning and Technology Resources and Professor for the Annandale Campus, Northern Virginia Community College, says “We’re trying to use the role of the library as the largest informal academic space on the campus to help connect students to things that they might otherwise not be aware of that are available to them.”

### **Section 3 "The Open Movement"**

#### **"A Turning Point for Scholarly Publishing" by Lindsay Ellis (2019)**

This article discusses the future of scholarly publishing between universities and science publishing behemoths like Elsevier, Springer Nature, and Wiley. The open access movement in scholarly publishing, although around for many years, hasn't quite had the effect on the traditional publishing process that was originally hoped for. But things are changing as universities negotiate for subscription relief that is beginning to erode the big publisher hegemony, due to bottom-up efforts from libraries combined with top-down

directives from various funding agencies.

Still, it's not easy to balance cheaper subscription costs with open access as there are disagreements about how the particulars of open access should happen. Some academics say that open access is only open when all content is freely accessible with no copyright restrictions for re-use. Yet others say certain restrictions, including limited commercial use, are acceptable. The ultimate goal is one package to cover subscription charges and open-access publishing fees.

Since the early 2000s, universities have been trying to get away from the journal packages sold in bulk by major publishers. Big Deal bundles have been canceled by six universities, including the California system. Ivy Anderson, a lead University of California negotiator on the Elsevier contract, says "...maybe this direction is a reasonable one to pursue. The open-access conversation is going mainstream in a way it hasn't before."

**"After the Elsevier 'Tipping Point,' Research Libraries Consider Their Options" by Lindsay Ellis (2019)**

As a follow-up to "A Turning Point for Scholarly Publishing," this article continues the question of flat budgets and bulk journal subscriptions through the eyes of academic librarians. University Librarian at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Elaine L. Westbrook, sees the University of California's (UC) decision as a corrective for the increasing subscription bundles from Elsevier and other publishers. Westbrook began meeting with deans, administrators, and faculty groups to discuss the situation, and emailed her campus that renewing costly bundles is "unaffordable and unsustainable." She sees the news about UC as a "tipping point" that has her "compelled to disrupt...We're

more empowered to stick to our values."

The University of Virginia Library's Director of Information Policy, Brandon Butler, wrote how big subscription deals devour large shares of library budgets. Referencing the UC decision, he noted "It may just be, if one big institution walks completely away and lives to tell, it feels like a game changer that everyone else could be more courageous about what they want to do."

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) drafted a set of recommendations about open sharing of MIT materials. The Director of Libraries at MIT, Chris Bourg, said the California news "...is really helpful in terms of galvanizing faculty to pay attention and to really think about how we want to act as a scholarly community."

**"A Lesson from UC's Split with Elsevier: Keep the Faculty in the Loop" by Lindsay Ellis (2019)**

The UC-Elsevier split provided important guidance for other research universities across the country interested in negotiations to reduce journal subscription costs—that it's vitally important to share a lot of information on that process with your campus faculty. Faculty need access to scholarly journals for research and teaching, thus transparency in situations that may affect them professionally will help to build support. UC held forums and emailed regularly to faculty members during the process, while also providing information to scholars on how to access Elsevier articles before contracts expired, such as using interlibrary loan, online repositories, and also contacting an author for a copy of their article.

The Executive Director of the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources

Coalition (SPARC), Heather Joseph, observed that the UC decision wouldn't be welcomed by all faculty, but UC's consistent messaging and communication with scholars was a respectful confirmation of their professional needs. "UC's decision is distinct because of its scope and because the system garnered the political support it needed," she said.

**"Commentary: The Corporate Capture of Open-Access Publishing" by Sarah Kember and Amy Brand (2023)**

The title page of this article has an apposite subheading: "Done wrong, the movement will just reproduce the old monopolies." This article explores the impacts of corporate entities on open-access publishing. Although the original intent of open-access was to increase equity, accessibility, and affordability in scholarly communication, the goal is being weakened by corporate interests who have tried to influence OA models by items like Article Processing Charges (APCs).

Also called "pay to publish," APCs are fees paid to publishers to make research articles openly accessible to everyone. What was previously covered by subscription costs, such as peer-review, publishing, online hosting, etc., is now covered by APCs, which can vary hugely in cost and makes publishing unaffordable, especially in economically underdeveloped areas like the Global South. This is counterintuitive to the Open Access movement. The authors have this solution:

The answers, we propose, lie somewhere in that overlooked, undervalued middle ground of nonprofit or fair-profit university-press publishing, mission-aligned with the academy. Many of those presses have been leaders in finding ways to meet the goals of providing both equitable access to knowledge and equitable participation

in the creation of new knowledge. These are the publishers that universities should protect, invest in, and make deals with. Perhaps an international network of university-based publishers, libraries, and other public-knowledge providers could work together, balancing paid-for and open research content in a way that is sustainable rather than extractive, and that still values the research itself.

**“A Historic Moment’: New Guidance Requires Federally Funded Research to Be Open Access” by Megan Zahneis (2020)**

In 2020 the White House released guidance from The Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) dictating that federally funded research be made freely and immediately available to the public, doing away with an optional 12-month embargo. Alondra Nelson, head of OSTP, said “The American people fund tens of billions of dollars of cutting-edge research annually. There should be no delay or barrier between the American public and the returns on their investments in research.” Heather Joseph, Executive Director of SPARC, welcomed the news, adding that it is significant as it will “help boost scientific integrity and trust in science” by allowing other scientists to validate researchers’ conclusions.

The decision was spurred by the urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic when scholarly publishers lifted paywalls for COVID-related articles and made research available in machine-readable formats, which Joseph said allowed scholars to use text- and data-mining, artificial-intelligence, and computational techniques on others’ work. She further notes that she hopes the guidance language will support “measures to reduce inequities in publishing,” which will benefit early-career scholars and those from underserved

backgrounds.

**Reviewer's note:** This 2020 article was updated in 2022 to add comments from publishers Elsevier and Springer Nature. For those subscribing to *The Chronicle* online, you will only see the 2022 updated article.

#### **Section 4 "Strategic Significance"**

**"Commentary: The Fight over Berkeley Library is a Fight for the Future of Higher Ed" by Caitlin Zaloom (2023)**

The George and Mary Foster Anthropology Library contained roughly 80,000 books and field notes and was the subject of a lengthy protest to keep it open in 2023. Money to keep it open in its full, historical capacity was no longer financially feasible due to University administrators investing more than \$500 million in a new data-sciences center. As Zaloom writes,

This is no local fight. Two visions of the university are clashing. One vaunts technical mastery and promotes corporate will; the other supports voices from people and places regularly excluded from universities and, often, turns critical attention toward industry and academe itself. There is no question that the first vision — tied to both big business and donors — now dominates higher education; you can see it on every campus in the country. But at Berkeley, one of the nation's flagship public institutions, it is a particularly ugly sight.

The University says that removing books and eliminating stacks will save them \$400,000 per year, but Zaloom says the cost to students and faculty will be much higher because they will lose access to cultures, as well as ideas possibly helpful to solving today's

problems. In closing she writes, “They will lose access to a sacred community gathering place on an increasingly corporate campus. No one in the data-sciences center will know how to count the damage.”

**Reviewer’s update:** The University reached a compromise, of sorts, with protesting students. The Library will no longer circulate its collection, as much of it is either being warehoused or moved to the main collection, but will remain open as a reading room with a small collection for on-site browsing.

### **"Chronicle Intelligence Forum: The Strategic Value of Libraries" (2024)**

*The Chronicle* convened a panel moderated by Scott Carlson, a *Chronicle* senior writer. The panel included Melissa Blankenstein, a researcher at Ithaca, S+R; Lisa Forrest, the director of the Davidson College Library at Davidson College; and Fellow at the American Institute of Architects, David Moore, a principal and the higher-education practice leader at McMillan Pazdan Smith Architecture, author of *Planning Optimal Library Spaces: Principles, Processes, and Practices*. The panel goal was to offer perspectives on the current value of academic libraries.

Question 1: What is the key strategic function of the library today?

Librarians’ answers: Connecting people to one another and to trusted resources; how can the library serve students more widely; how can the library be there for them both academically and to expand basic-needs access for them and their communities.

Architect answer (more interesting to this reviewer!): “As architects, we need to understand what a library needs to do, and then we begin to set strategies to get there.

Does it have a strategy around sustainability? Does it have a strategy for student retention?

Do we have a strategy for student recruitment? It's usually student centered, it's about the student experience. That's the overarching or prevailing strategy. And then there's these sort of sub-strategies to accomplish goals."

Carlson queried Lisa Forrest about managing the different kinds of roles the library has taken on in recent years. Forrest replied that the library is about connecting but also about partnerships of need. When the pandemic was at its height, and digital learning became the only option, the library helped faculty design their courses. After that experience, everyone came to know the value of the library because it's about access but it's also an important component of "the teaching and learning mission." When renovations were needed they felt it was important to renovate the library in a way that reflects Davidson as an institution and also reflects its priorities and values.

Other interesting points and observations that emerged from the forum:

- Where you put your money in the library is where you know where your priorities are. and that should be on students
- Just because a library may possess the physical space for certain campus functions or facilities doesn't mean it should go there
- Students want to know how they can use artificial intelligence; they need more guidance, and they need faculty members to model that
- Talk to faculty on campus and find out what their professional development needs are and what the library can do to help them with that

- Library spaces should be designed for current technology needs but not designed so specifically that if technology changes, the space cannot be later adapted for something else

Overall, this reviewer recommends *A Librarian's Toolbox* as a worthy addition to academic library collections for keeping informed about the current state of academic libraries, their campus roles, and their user needs.