

# Experimental Approaches to Transforming Academic Library Print Collections

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*As academic libraries renovate their facilities, often seeking to reduce print collection footprints within public-facing service areas, there is an opportunity to develop new design strategies and methods for print curation that meet the needs of the communities served by these libraries. In alignment with a major renovation, ASU Library developed a community-focused approach to academic library print collections, providing opportunities to engage and inspire them to create new knowledge and foster an overall sense of belonging. As part of a grant-funded program, ASU Library created eight experimental projects that explored the ways in which people engage with books in print, which led to new collaborative methods for developing print collections for the post-renovation reopening of Hayden Library, ASU's largest library on Tempe campus. This work has resulted in improved knowledge of effective workflows and communication strategies to enhance engagement with print collections, becoming a signature library program to co-develop inclusive featured browsing collections with university and community partners.*

Arizona State University (ASU) Library published a white paper in 2017, arguing that the time had arrived to transform book collections within academic libraries to become more effective tools for fostering engagement with library users.<sup>1</sup> While digital access has revolutionized how scholars and learners interact with information resources and enabled the reinvention of library spaces, we contend that the potential for using print collections as a tool to enhance the twenty-first century academic library has not yet been realized.

Academic library print collections remain an important part of the scholarly research process, particularly for graduate and faculty researchers, and may also serve as tools for learning and creative inquiry for all library users. In addition, print collections may serve other functions within the educational ecosystem. Books may be explored and interpreted as objects; and print volumes on shelves are a visual presence in library spaces. Conceiving of the circulating book stacks as a flexible user-focused service opens new possibilities for how we as library professionals develop, manage, and present print books to library users. The white paper articulated goals for academic libraries that include proactive and “consciously chosen” print collection management, new approaches to collections curation that reflect cultural breadth, and inclusive community engagement with collections in print across the curation lifecycle. By focusing on “open stack” print collections, academic libraries can leverage existing holdings at any scale, test new approaches to collection development at relatively low cost, and encourage engagement with anyone who encounters library spaces.<sup>2</sup>

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Following the white paper research, Lorrie McAllister, then associate university librarian for Collections Services & Analysis, began elucidating a set of ideas that informed a local strategy of inquiry for print collection design and development at ASU.<sup>3</sup> The ideas included:

- print collections can be used for engagement, not just for access;
- academic libraries should leverage print collections for engagement within our spaces;
- traditional notions of “open stacks” should leverage the spirit of the open education and open access movements, including participatory practices of collection development that engage library users;
- transforming print collections means that we are asked to explore transforming our operations and methods for book selection, presentation, and management; and
- print collection curation should employ a critical approach to selection, acquisition, description, and management to enable more inclusive library practices, processes, and collections.<sup>4</sup>

As part of the three-year “Future of Print” initiative funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, ASU Library explored and tested many of these ideas within our local context. In particular, we were faced with the renovation of the Hayden Library, the largest library on Tempe campus, which necessitated new designs for print collections on four of the library’s five floors. Our goal was to plan for a library that incorporated print collections as part of its space design, within the context of a dynamic contemporary institution of higher education. To achieve this goal, we pursued two lines of inquiry that stemmed from the ideas emerging from the 2017 white paper. One track, discussed in the narrative that follows, led to the creation of a set of experimental projects that helped our collections project team learn about print collection engagement across multiple aspects of our collections work. We were able to incorporate the results of most of the projects into the final collections design for Hayden Library, and use what we learned to initiate a “featured collections” program that continues to generate engaging displays within our public-facing service areas. The second strategy incorporated the use of available data to develop an informed and user-centered design approach to a massive open stack research collection.<sup>5</sup> Together, the strategies and methods we developed allowed us to explore new approaches to collections work that we could carry into our future operational endeavors.

## Project Context

In 2016, Michael Crow, President of Arizona State University, called for a “fifth wave” of higher education for institutions to prioritize the “production, synthesis, and storage of knowledge” using emerging technologies.<sup>6</sup> Crow contended that by using scalable and innovative strategies, institutions can and must evolve to meet the needs of 21st century learners. Arizona State University has since grown toward this aspirational goal, becoming a comprehensive public research university with an institution-wide commitment to excellence, access, and impact.<sup>7</sup> As of 2023, ASU Library serves approximately 145,000 undergraduate and graduate students across five campuses, including students in both online and residential programs. These students represent a diverse range of social, economic, and cultural backgrounds and identities. Additionally, the Library serves nearly 5,000 faculty across 17

different colleges and schools, along with researchers, instructors, staff, and emeriti. The Library also supports students in ASU's non-degree programs such as the Global Freshman Academy; prospective students and K-12 students within the region; alumni and donors; people residing in places where ASU campuses and satellite locations are placed or planned, such as the Los Angeles and Washington D.C. locations; current and future Arizonans, and those seeking to understand the Peoples, cultures, and histories of the southwest.

In 2017, Jim O'Donnell, University Librarian for the Arizona State University, presented at the Charleston Library Conference about the future of print at colleges and universities.<sup>8</sup> He spoke of books as objects of engagement that foster critical thinking and spark curiosity. This speech contained the seeds of what our team would grow into the "future of print" initiative at ASU, ultimately informing a major library renovation project. We sought to reimagine and then create library spaces where print collections are an active participant in 21st century library space design and brought to the forefront and spotlighted as one of our central services.<sup>9</sup>

ASU received planning grant support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for The Future of the Academic Library Print Collection project to define issues and options affecting the design of the next generation of print collections for academic libraries. ASU hosted a workshop, inviting a cross-section of colleagues from across multiple institutions, including ASU, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cornell University, and the University of Arizona. Based on the findings from this workshop, ASU Library developed a white paper outlining a vision for the future of print collections in academic libraries.<sup>10</sup> The completion of this paper was followed by a \$380,000 implementation grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The grant allowed the Library to assemble a project team in the summer of 2018 led by associate university librarian, Lorrie McAllister and including data analysis specialist, Tammy Dang, and curation specialist, Emily Pattni, with project coordination from Shari Laster, then head of Open Stack Collections. McAllister led this initiative, seizing the opportunity to experiment with new collection design strategies that encouraged and responded to user engagement within twenty-first century library spaces.

## Literature Review

Recent literature on encouraging browsing and interaction with academic library print collections reflects an unsettled landscape of purpose, methods, and outcomes for projects similar to ours. With profound transformations in information-seeking behavior, the rise and subsequent fragmentation of social media platforms, and shifting demographics of students enrolled in higher education, engagement with print collections in academic library settings often receives at most only peripheral treatment in the literature.<sup>11</sup> With pressures in physical space planning, the footprint of extant print collections is often understandably positioned as a problem to be managed.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, broader trends within academic collection development engage a range of issues, including openly-accessible content, specialized and archival collections, continued refinement and change with e-books, including demand-driven acquisition programs, and shared collection development and management strategies.<sup>13</sup>

These and other factors suggest the opportunity to specify, reframe, or reconsider goals for academic library collection development.<sup>14</sup>

Changing priorities in academic research libraries, including a greater breadth of support services, led to a decreasing emphasis on browsing collections that had often served as the most visible encouragement for recreational reading.<sup>15</sup> Librarians argued that this trend undermined efforts to encourage reading among undergraduate students, though some also expressed hope that electronic browsing would become in some way equivalent to the in-person browsing experience.<sup>16</sup> The rise of the “One Read,” or similar campus- or community-wide programs that highlight a book as the focal point for academic programming over a given period of time, became one way to challenge this trend; displays, paperback exchanges, and book reviews have also been recognized as strategies that can complement or supplant browsing collections.<sup>17</sup>

Although the practice of developing display collections for patron browsing has existed for many years, recent literature indicates that creating book displays remains a key strategy to encourage the use of print collections. For example, one library launched a book display program to raise awareness of books promoting diversity in partnership with the institution’s office of multicultural affairs.<sup>18</sup> This book display led to an increase in collection use and provided an opportunity to cross-promote multicultural programming on campus.<sup>19</sup> Matching displays to user interests also shows potential. At a religiously-affiliated university library, religious fiction placed on display alongside religious non-fiction circulated more than the non-fiction, and more than similar fiction that was available in the stacks; the authors noted that the display was most successful when the materials available were focused on religious fiction and non-fiction.<sup>20</sup> Similar success was shown with a leisure reading collection focused on light reading and escapist themes that was developed and maintained for a consumer health collection at a health information library located within a medical center.<sup>21</sup>

Displays alone do not always lead to a significant increase in the circulation of print collections. Following a transition into library compact shelving, a business library pursued a strategy of creating displays to encourage usage, taking into consideration elements of visual appeal including display shelving and cover design; circulation increased for the displayed titles, but there was not an overall increase in circulation of print materials.<sup>22</sup> One research article looking at the phenomenon of stacks “frozen in time” as their acquisitions switched to an electronic-preferred strategy noted that while usage of the print collections dropped, it did not do so at a rate that would indicate e-books as fully substitutable for print, which may indicate that the newest e-books are invisible to library patrons.<sup>23</sup> While some factors about print collections usage are outside the control of libraries, it is helpful to consider that books can be a source of interest without leaving the building. A four-year study at a small private university found that in-house use is a valuable indicator of print collections engagement; data from this study also showed that highly visible and browsable collections demonstrated greater usage than traditional stacks arrangements.<sup>24</sup>

Emerging approaches to outreach for academic library services also offer potential lessons for collections work. A recent content analysis study exploring the definition of “outreach” for academic

libraries suggests that programs intended to increase collections engagement may be appropriate to consider in this category.<sup>25</sup> The author's synthesized definition describes outreach activities as the "design and [implementation of] a variety of methods of intervention to advance awareness, positive perceptions, and use of library services, spaces, [and] collections. . . . Methods are primarily targeted to current students and faculty, however, subsets of these groups . . . can be additional target audiences. In addition to library-centric goals, outreach methods are often designed to support shared institutional goals such as lifelong learning [and] cultural awareness."<sup>26</sup> In light of this definition, a collections program prioritizing meaningful engagement and collaboration with diverse groups, leading to the creation of displays that reflect community perspectives and interests, may be positioned as a form of outreach.

Situating collections engagement in alignment with outreach efforts encourages the use of metrics for success that go beyond circulation. In considering the messaging impact of collections programs, it is helpful to note that outreach efforts communicating clear and strategic messages to the communities served may themselves act as markers of value to stakeholders.<sup>27</sup> This suggests that featuring thoughtfully selected collections materials may support desirable messaging about the institution's priorities. Additionally, framing engagement as a cycle of relationship management highlights the importance of collaborative and mutually respectful partnerships in developing and sustaining services.<sup>28</sup> For institutions that prioritize values including justice, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, building relationships in support of inclusive collection development has the potential to enact their commitments to support marginalized communities.<sup>29</sup> Aligning collection development with the service priorities of the institution has an additional long-lasting impact. Materials collected now will become a part of the ecosystem of scholarly works available to future researchers, demonstrating to them the priorities of today. The literature suggests that print collections can be designed to effectively convey messages about the ways in which a library aims to serve the communities that regularly encounter their spaces, while providing a needed service that is relevant to stakeholders.

By orienting collections work toward a "collections as service" model, libraries are able to more explicitly center the needs of the communities they serve as they consider resource allocations and priorities. A collection assessment at a very large research university undertaken as part of this model opened the door to a suite of changed practices, including loosening circulation limits, extending loan periods, and expanding collections eligible for resource sharing.<sup>30</sup> Another institution sought to develop methods for an impact analysis of how library collections may support curricular goals for diversity, equity, and inclusion related courses.<sup>31</sup> These approaches show potential lessons for collection development; collecting print works outside the traditional scope of scholarly monographs is a responsive practice if doing so aligns with user needs. Understanding those needs can take many forms. Both observational information and community data can be used to inform curation of collections in library spaces; and seeking direct feedback from patrons is an easy way to ensure that additions to the collection reflect community needs.<sup>32</sup> This input can also be gathered more formally; in taking a more proactive approach to print collections, a case study building on the ASU Library white paper

incorporated faculty input and interviews to develop engagement programs and provide input to the library's strategic planning process.<sup>33</sup>

Our methods of active experimentation sought to explore different ways to connect people with books, with a goal of broadening the strategies available to collaboratively engage with key partners and stakeholders. Many of the themes described above resonate with the experiences of the project team, including those emphasizing alignment with community needs and interests, and those identifying positive outcomes for collections programs that extend beyond increased circulation statistics.

## Methods to Experiment for Engagement

One hypothesis described in the white paper is that engagement with users is the key to activating print collections in the digital age. To investigate this hypothesis, we held several informal student focus groups at the start of the initiative to learn about how students at ASU use library resources, including spaces, programs, and collections, and how they think we might better support them. Participants shared that they would most likely spend time exploring library book collections for an assignment or some other academic purpose. Our focus group results showed that while occasionally students may try to find a book for pleasure reading, they noted that library books are not organized in a way that encourages this type of exploration. Students told us that they did not always know about our programs and resources even if they regularly visited the library.

With the assistance of many small task forces composed of personnel from across the library, we prepared a series of experimental projects over the first two years of the initiative that were intended to explore ways in which people engage with books in print.<sup>34</sup> The experiments were chosen based on a card sorting exercise, with cards representing a library location, user group, and method that informed the experiment process. The cards were sorted into ten experiments that the project team then investigated for feasibility and availability of community partners; ultimately, eight experiments were completed and are described below. Each experiment revolved around a print collection with themes or books selected by different ASU affiliates and groups, where we considered different ways to select, organize, present, and contextualize the collection.

The experiments derived from the card sorting activity covered a variety of selection, presentation, and engagement methodologies. When possible, experiments also included a collaborative element, which allowed our team to highlight relevant research and personal interests, uplift the voices of people who have been underrepresented in academic libraries, and employ new design strategies to connect with all who use our libraries. Below we list the eight experiments followed by a short description of the factors used to specify the experiment.

- “Surprise Me!”—An experiment to see how students respond to and interact with books shelved in non-traditional ways.
- “Collecting Collections”—An opportunity for ASU communities to reflect on collecting practices and share their own collections.

- “Health Humanities Horizons”—A collection of books, DVDs, and CDs chosen by faculty from The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the College of Health Solutions, the New College and the Nursing College.
- “¡Vamos Argentina!”—A series of lectures, art installations, and demonstrations highlighting aspects of Argentine culture while drawing attention to the Library’s collection of Argentine literature in print.
- “Barrett Honors College Little Library”—A “take one, leave one” book collection to support student interactions with books outside of library spaces.
- “Visual Bibliographies”—A closer look at the research process that highlights faculty publications and interviews.
- “Dust and Shadow”—An immersive audio and print experience of the southwest desert.
- “Untold Histories”—A collection of books chosen by students to represent their cultures and backgrounds, with testimonials to encourage others to tell their own stories.



**Figure 1.** Books shelved spine-backward in “Surprise Me!”

Each experimental collection was displayed in its selected location for a given period of time with ASU Library branding for the “Future of Print” initiative, and descriptive information inviting exploration and feedback. We also took steps to better understand how we could assess user engagement with these materials, beyond the analysis of circulation data. If we were conceiving of print materials as engagement tools, we wanted to consider additional ways to measure this engagement. By including various assessment mechanisms with each experiment, we were able to compare different levels of user engagement with print collections.

## Experiment Summaries

Our first series of experimental projects explored ways to initiate engagement around books. The “Surprise Me!” experiment arranged volumes of modern poetry spine-backward on a small browsing shelf in our library on ASU’s West Valley Campus. The idea behind this experiment was that poetry as an art form can present unexpected surprises, much like a book shelved unexpectedly spine-backward can also surprise library users. Our assessment showed that this display did, in fact, raise confusion! As this was the first book collection of its kind, we were able to more deeply consider and operationalize the decision-making behind selecting, moving, arranging, and displaying books outside of our current

practices. This project also served as a test run for new workflows involving other teams, including the communications team and circulation staff.

In “Collecting Collections” we arranged books about various forms of collecting in a bookstore-style display. The display was designed for the lobby of Hayden library that remained open during renovation, which gave library visitors a sense of how we were changing our book display methods while inviting library personnel to participate in our experiments. We showcased images of personal collections of library staff alongside books about collections, arranged amid 3D-printed models of collectible objects. The purpose was to invite visitors to reflect on their own collections and collecting interests through a variety of interactive elements. A guestbook demonstrated that visitors engaged with the display and explored the books, which speaks both to its playful theme and its inviting design.

The “Health Humanities Horizons” experiment allowed us to co-curate a collection of books that examined health issues through a diverse lens of social, religious, cultural, or historical contexts. This effort also raised awareness about a new Health Humanities certificate available at ASU. The process of working with faculty to develop the browsable collection cultivated closer relationships between those faculty and library personnel. Leveraging this group of learning resources displayed in the Downtown Phoenix Campus library location helped us establish new partnerships across additional schools and centers.

The underlying theme for the “¡Vamos Argentina!” experiment was to seek alignment between library programming and collections. Organized in conjunction with the planned residency of Argentinian artists Guillermo Faivovich and Nicolas Goldberg, the Library hosted six events, including lectures, yerba maté tastings, and tango lessons. While the events attracted some attention, we concluded that the relationship between programming and collections engagement remained tenuous, in that programming did not result in a significant increase in collection usage, though the experience strengthened important relationships with collaborators.

Our team also worked with the Barrett Student Ambassadors, a group of students from the Barrett Honors College who were hired to work closely with the Library to help build research skills among their peers. Together, we installed a “little library” inside the Honors College at Tempe campus, inviting



**Figure 2.** “Health Humanities Horizons” included books and DVDs selected by faculty in support of a new certificate program.



students to take a book that they want to read and leave a book to share. Our project team seeded this library with used books (not from library collections) recommended by students. We also met with the Ambassadors and other library student workers on their paid time to hear their ideas on themes and books to include in new collections, and solicited suggestions from students outside the library through tabling events, online submission forms, and focus groups.

In the second year of our project, we focused on collaborative methodologies for developing small browsable collections. The “Visual Bibliographies” project featured publications of four faculty from different academic schools on campus. For each collaboration, we used the bibliography from the scholar’s most recent book to gather cited books, journal articles, and archival reproductions into a single collection to show how much goes into writing a scholarly monograph. We also conducted interviews with each professor to learn more about their research process and their engagement with library resources. These interviews were presented on kiosks next to the collections, allowing for multidimensional engagement with outputs from the research process.

“Dust & Shadow” was an ambitious project initiated by the fledgling Desert Humanities Initiative, with support from ASU’s Institute for Humanities Research. A “desert salon” was installed in a library study room, with an immersive audio, visual, and sensory experience of the southwest desert, imagined as a “Solarpunk” waystation that enacts a sustainable and diverse future interweaving community and nature. The power of the desert sun inspired a “punk,” or alternative reading of a library study space. Our team partnered with the project investigators to select print books from a bibliography of inspirational works, which we displayed as an integral part of the art installation.

We also partnered with student workers from ASU Library’s Community-Driven Archives initiative to design a collection that they called “Untold Histories.” Established in 2017, ASU Library’s Community-Driven Archives (CDA) initiative builds strong relationships with historically marginalized communities in Arizona and the southwest region, supporting collaborative training and empowerment for community archivists in the Phoenix metro area.<sup>35</sup> The students, many of whom identify as People of Color or/and members of the LGBTQ+ community, selected books that shared stories



**Figure 3.** Books played a prominent role in the temporary installation of an “acoustic ecology salon” space.

about lived experiences from communities that were personally meaningful to them. They also led a complementary event inviting other students to record their oral histories. Their goal was to create an opportunity for members of the ASU community to reflect upon their own identities and tell their own stories. The collection was visually appealing with a bookstore-style display incorporating images of the students who participated. Students later shared that they felt empowered, represented, and proud to work with the Library on this project. They shared their work on the project with their friends and families, too. Responses to this collection became a driving force behind our work moving forward to support and empower students, including student workers.

## Assessment

Our measures of success for experimental engagement encompassed both traditional metrics and other approaches to considering engagement. Engagement with collections can be reflected with circulation data, including in-house use data, but we also wanted to see if there were other measures for engagement that could indicate the relative success of various efforts to connect collections with people.

As a traditional metric, we examined circulation data, first exploring and then looking beyond the percentage of the collection that circulated during a given period. Factors such as item location, publication date, acquisition date, and loan history allowed us to see the impact of highlighting books through these small collections. For example, older books taken from our off-site storage facility tended to see greater overall usage when placed alongside newer books in a high traffic area. New books purchased for these collections also saw greater usage, which may reflect the fact that we retained the dust jackets to maximize visual impact of the book and attract interest.

We also looked to other assessment mechanisms that could be roughly comparative between the experimental collections. Aside from circulation data and site visits, we asked visitors to rate book displays by placing an emoji sticker on a board that represents how they feel about the collection. We chose this form of assessment because we thought it would be both fun and easy for library users to participate. Stickers were interpreted based on a Likert scale to gauge levels of interest:

- 😞 1—Participant has a low level of engagement or finds the presentation unsatisfactory.
- 😐 2—Participant is indifferent to the display. They might not like the display or care that it is there.
- 😬 3—Participant is engaged to the point of thinking about the contents of the display. We interpret this as the display being either confusing or thought-provoking.
- 😊 4—Participant is engaged and likes the display.
- 🥰 5—Participant is very engaged with the display and may be inclined to check out future library collections.

Although there could be multiple meanings behind a single emoji, the number of stickers on the board showed the amount of participation relative to the other experimental projects. Anecdotally, we found

that students enjoyed this form of response as it allowed them to engage with the collection even if they did not check out a book. (To be fair, we also had a few stickers escape the library and show up in other campus locations.) This was a quick, easy strategy to learn how many people were engaging with a collection.

We embedded other assessment mechanisms into each experiment to measure the extent of engagement with the project. For example, we noted how many people attended events, how many promotional bookmarks were picked up, or how much interest was generated by news stories on the Library website. We also took note of the interest on the part of our collaborators in participating in a future partnership.

Engagement and collections usage varied widely from project to project, which suggested to us that there is no “one size fits all” approach to increase engagement. Although only around half of our experimental projects included purchasing new titles for the collection, we ultimately came to consider the extent to which a featured collection led us to add to the library’s holdings as an important metric for success. Purchasing titles for a display also adds to the richness of our collections, which remain part of the Library indefinitely. By engaging with community members who are willing to tell us what they would like to see on our shelves, the titles we acquire shift toward a more diverse range of themes, authors, and perspectives.

## **Discussion—What We Learned**

The aspiration of ASU’s 2017 white paper “The Future of the Academic Library Print Collection: A Space for Engagement” was to motivate ideas that transform library spaces to engage users more effectively. ASU Library’s subsequent experiments to explore both community-engaged and data-informed selection processes brought the ideas from the white paper into a practical, local context for further investigation. Early findings in our project demonstrated that data-driven collections work and community-centered engagement have limited overlap, and this result was sustained throughout our project.

Although we began our work looking at institutional demographic data and library bibliographic and circulation data, we eventually recognized the need to reconceptualize what it means to use data for collections work, and how engagement can inform selection processes. While institutional demographics provide context for collections planning, demographics cannot effectively direct our work with community-centered engagement, because data alone do not indicate how communities are open in different ways to engage with the library. In other words, knowing more about the ASU community at scale, and knowing more about those who already use our print collections, cannot tell us who is willing to partner with us to build better collections, or who would use our collections more—if only we had the books that interested them!

We affirmed that close partnerships depend on relationship development and trust-building, which is demonstrated through integrity and consistency between what library personnel say and what they

do. Among the many benefits to the time invested in these partnerships, we saw an enrichment of our overall holdings; these additions to our collections are then reflected in future collections work. Also, collaborations should begin at the earliest stages of planning to build trusted relationships from the outset. The team learned that it is essential to build interconnected workflows and services across library teams to accomplish project planning, implementation, and assessment. A key takeaway from our work is that informed decisions about library print collection development cannot be made in isolation from the people who use our collections, along with the library personnel who create, describe, manage, and store our collections.<sup>36</sup>

Our greatest challenge in exploring engagement with collections has been to understand how to build relationships that result in effective collection development. Based on initial larger-scale outreach failures to engage ASU constituents, we decided to instead leverage pre-existing relationships with faculty and student groups. For example, by having the Barrett Student Ambassadors, who already worked closely with the Library, take the lead on the selection and communication of a “take one, leave one” display in the Barrett Honors College, it was easier to get student participation and manage the collection despite it not being in a library space. This was a great example of leveraging an existing trusted relationship to accomplish a print collections project.

Projects that involve complex partnerships such as the immersive desert salon designed by the Desert Humanities Initiative require library-wide coordination. After an initial meeting with collaborators, we reached out to Library units that would be needed to support the project. We worked closely with the Library’s communications team, which is responsible for signs, design elements, and event planning. We also required the help of the technology team to set up videos and microphones, frontline services staff for directional assistance, and operational staff for logistical support. We sought to identify and secure a location that would be highly visible and accessible to the intended audience for the project while ensuring that events and programs were not in competition with other library offerings. By initiating coordination early in the process, we intended to foster a spirit of collaboration and communication. At the completion of the experimental project, we compiled and published summary reports on our project website. Through the events, reports, and collections, we strengthened our network for outreach and communication within the Library and demonstrated that the library can be a partner in experimental humanities research.

Overall, our project resulted in better understanding of the staffing needed for open stack curation work, which must be integrated with library operations, analysis, and engagement. Collaborating with liaisons and community stakeholders to develop featured collections is “high-touch” in that it requires knowledge of cooperative and technical processes that need to be accomplished in close communication with stakeholders. This role requires specialized experience with library resources and workflows to coordinate internal library operations and ensure ongoing success of our print browsing program. Liaison librarians generally do not have the time or operational experience to handle these responsibilities, so the approach we piloted is to partner with liaison librarians to accomplish these projects. The engagement work we undertook shows that both listening and trust are important to our

communities and that over time, we can build meaningful relationships that inform print collections curation.

## Next Steps and Future Directions

Our experiments led to the development of a new program for “featured collections,” or collections that are the product of collaborations between the Library and our communities to create meaningful learning and engagement experiences using print and digital resources. Defining characteristics for featured collections include community collaborators, such as student organizations or faculty, and interactive elements including dust jackets or digital media. We are also able to continue conducting periodic assessments of the collections based on usage data, user feedback, and other mechanisms.

The collections experiments also shaped a workflow for the design and selection of our concourse classroom collections. The first phase of the Hayden Library renovation was reopened to the public in Fall 2019, introducing seven new library classrooms. These university-scheduled classrooms presented an opportunity to connect with students and faculty. Beginning in Spring 2019, four liaison librarians identified instructors scheduled to teach Fall 2019 semester courses in these new classrooms, focusing on classes that represented interdisciplinary topics such as Adolescence (CDE/SOC 312) or Southwest Before the United States (SLC 194). Some liaisons opted to strengthen existing relationships, while others took the opportunity to establish new connections with instructors they had not yet worked with. Each instructor was invited to participate in designing a collection related to their course topic. The books, DVDs, and other resources selected by the librarians and instructors represented a wide range of scholarly and popular resources, with a goal to make each collection appealing to students who would pass by the collections on their way to class. We repeated this collection design process in advance of the Spring 2020 semester, which coincided with the reopening of Hayden Library in January 2020.

In the final year of this grant-funded project, two of the project staff moved on to new opportunities. However, the successes of the project team have informed staffing decisions for ASU Library, as we seek to continue building engagement with print collections. Despite some disruption to interest in print collections resulting from the global pandemic that followed the work described here, the potential for using print collections as a tool to enhance the twenty-first century library can continue to be explored and realized. Academic libraries have the opportunity to make use of spaces and collections in ways that enhance their missions and further open their doors to the communities they serve.

## Notes

1. ASU Library, “The Future of the Academic Library Print Collection: A Space for Engagement,” Arizona State University, October 2017, <https://hdl.handle.net/2286/R.I.50125>.
2. At ASU Library, our open stack collections include millions of print and openly-accessible digital materials for all to explore and use. Here, we focus on the print collections that are openly available to browse within library public spaces.

3. For a detailed exploration of conceptual underpinnings and implications of the open stacks model, and further exploration of these ideas in their mature form, see Lorrie McAllister, “The New Open Stacks,” in *Transforming Print: Collection Development and Management for Our Connected Future*, edited by Lorrie McAllister and Shari Laster (Chicago: American Library Association, 2021), <https://hdl.handle.net/2286/R.2.N.160096>.
4. For methods and results emerging from this project, see Lorrie McAllister, et al., “Enhancing an Academic Library Renovation Project with Creative Open Stack Print Collections Services,” Arizona State University, June 2024, <https://hdl.handle.net/2286/R.2.N.194545>.
5. This strategy and associated methods are discussed in McAllister et al., “Enhancing an Academic Library Renovation Project.”
6. Michael M. Crow, “Launching the Next Wave in Higher Education,” March 7, 2016, SXSWedu, Austin, TX, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40-evzaz7d8>. See also Michael M. Crow and William B. Dabars, *The Fifth Wave: The Evolution of American Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020).
7. See Michael M. Crow and William B. Dabars, *Designing the New American University* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).
8. James O’Donnell, “The Future of Print in Open Stacks: A Proposal,” November 8, 2017, Charleston Library Conference, Charleston, SC, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Go4GJCYCLqk>.
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