

Strategic Plan, 2019-21: 2020 Update

Looking Forward:

Northwestern University Libraries and the University Press continue to play a key role in advancing the university's [priorities](#): to enhance intellectual eminence, support the student experience, elevate Northwestern's global presence, and improve our organizational excellence. The Libraries and the Press facilitate the creation and dissemination of knowledge. We deliver scholarly information and empower research and learning across multiple physical and digital locations, presenting innovative services concurrently with distinctive primary sources and original publications. We customize and actualize major academic assets including collections, technologies, professional expertise, and specialized facilities. Each area has seen significant transformation in recent years resulting in a robust foundational knowledge base that supports the research enterprise of the university. The current strategic plan has led our work since late 2018, and a new phase of planning will emerge after the conclusion of the Program Review in FY2021.

In the complex financial environment of the past three years, University Libraries are focusing on two approaches, assessment and outreach, to maximize current resources. The focus on assessment has motivated the evaluation of academic services and collections to ensure we are realigning resources in the least disruptive way for our users. The focus on outreach and engagement helps to ensure that our services, expertise, and collections are reaching the entire Northwestern community, and to develop analyses that articulate the impact the libraries have on our campus' academic endeavors.

2019 offered several strategic opportunities. The framework of a major long-range consortial initiative was architected by the Big Ten Academic Alliance, which will improve and coordinate access to print and digital collections across 15 universities. This comes right as NUL is pressed to undertake a comprehensive reset of our local acquisitions patterns. On campus, the Libraries are a central partner in the [Affordable Instructional Resources](#) program, and in 2019 we actively promoted work on open educational resources and services to support first-generation and lower-income students. Internally, we implemented a restructuring of our special collections departments and a reconfiguration of those stacks and public areas, efforts that will improve student and faculty access to curators and collections, and that will at the same time strengthen security and preservation. The urgency of these shifts came from the need to undertake a year-long mold remediation project in Deering Library, however, these directions had been long under development. Lastly, the beginning of the University program review process (the first in 15 years) has provided the context for a comprehensive review of the past decade.

Enhance the University's Intellectual Eminence and Impact

Library collections and services, realized physically and digitally, are fundamental to the support of teaching and learning and to the reputation of the university. Unique materials attract scholars from around the world and contribute to the intellectual eminence of the institution. The University Press is an internationally-respected organization through which the university expands scholarly communication, creation, and preservation of the scholarly record. Together we play a prominent role in the dissemination of scholarship as well as in the collecting of academic information.

The libraries will continue to build collections of distinction, as we have recently around the 1960s, while uncovering new ways to leverage existing collections like the Herskovits Library of African Studies. Implementation of and improvements to systems that manage access to these materials help to increase the efficiency of access for researchers and the use of manuscripts and archival materials. Highlights of those efforts are several collaborations with the Block Museum like the Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time exhibition, the purchase of important archives, and partnering on international summer institutes related to Africa. The press will continue to publish in philosophy, literary criticism, and theatre and performance studies, while expanding into key interdisciplinary areas such as critical ethnic studies. These efforts will support the core interdisciplinary role of the libraries and press campus. Assessment and engagement will allow us to better understand the impact of our collections, scholarly dissemination, and expertise.

In 2020 we will:

- continue our partnership with the Center for Native American and Indigenous Research, building on programming, research, and librarian faculty appointments to the Center.
- complete the final year of the grant-funded Berkeley Folk Music Festival digitization project and continue making materials in the digital collections available.
- disseminate scholarship in areas of strategic emphasis, by publishing in ethnic studies and theater/performance studies; and continuing to offer high-quality monographs in traditional areas of humanities strength through the University Press.
- maximize the impact of research and teaching with primary sources by completing the consolidation of physical spaces and policies for the diverse units of special collections.

Build Research Eminence

Libraries, publishing and diverse modes of scholarly communication are central to the creation and dissemination of Northwestern University's research output. The Libraries collectively are a core facility within the University's research infrastructure; and the NU Press is part of the worldwide system of research dissemination. We will maximize the impact of the Northwestern research enterprise by developing strategic partnerships with centers and programs to create accessible pathways to our output. The libraries will look to the Big Ten Academic Alliance (BTAA) Library Initiative on operationalizing the collective collection to expand the network of resources available to researchers and allow the libraries to focus its own resources to best meet the needs of Northwestern University.

Deering Library is poised to be a showpiece laboratory for the humanities, combining traditional and innovative resources and state-of-the-art teaching and curatorial spaces. The renovation of Deering Library will enhance the visibility and usability of the university's rare and unique resources and create distinctive spaces for study, teaching, presentation and community engagement that will attract students, faculty, and the wider community of scholars.

The Libraries established a Librarian Research Lab, a cohort focused on building the research output of faculty librarians and expanding the profile of the libraries professionally in areas such as materials conservation, managing digital audio-visual resources, privacy and learning analytics, area studies, and new approaches to teaching and learning.

In 2020 we will:

- continue a systematic review of faculty outreach strategies aligning librarians' engagement with academic departments to meet the needs of research, while identifying areas where new expertise needs to be developed.
- work with BTAA colleagues on operationalizing the idea of a collective BTAA collection.
- design a facility for the Libraries to quarantine and prepare materials requiring treatment or other special procedures before they are integrated into our collections.
- support the libraries unique and special collections through improvements to Deering Library, including the new HVAC system that will be installed.
- finish the Beyond the Repository IMLS grant developing policies and strategies to ensure access to the digital content in diverse university repositories.
- strengthen the expertise in data and metadata services that support University research.

Support the Student Experience

Northwestern University Libraries have a central role in student life and learning. We offer an open and welcoming experience for all students, whether they are seeking access to reliable information, academic support services, treasures of cultural heritage, technology for class assignments and research projects, group space for collaborative study, or an inspiring place to read and reflect. Spaces improved in 2019, such as Deering 208 and the refurbished Forum Room, exemplify these initiatives. We support basic and advanced learning across all fields of knowledge, responding to the vibrant diversity of our campus community. In recent years the Libraries have actively expanded outreach to students through customized support and events addressing curricular and co-curricular needs. The Press – operating effectively as a small business on campus-- contributes to the education of students with internships, work study opportunities, graduate assistantships and workshops.

We seek to innovate in services and spaces to function as an active crossroads for learning, research, discovery, and growth. In 2018, we partnered with Weinberg College, the Searle Center, and the Office of the Provost to create an academic resource center in the main library. As it develops, the ARC will provide one-stop shopping for important student academic support services like the writing center, tutoring, and individualized research consultations. The libraries will also continue to work student groups to archive their records and preserve the history of Northwestern University. The libraries aspire to establish Northwestern as a leader in the development of education for digital citizenship.

In 2020 we will:

- continue our partnerships around the Academic Resource Center in Main Library and ensure we offer a comprehensive suite of services to our students.
- assist faculty recipients of open education resources (OER) grants to further the adoption of OER on campus, and continue our work with the Affordable Instructional Resources group to target relevant approaches to reduce the costs of course materials.
- leverage opportunities in the Weinberg College First-Year curriculum pilot to ensure students have access to the expertise of librarian faculty and contribute that expertise to build the information and research skills of students.
- integrate a “digital citizenship” emphasis enabling students to be more knowledgeable users of digital information, understanding critical literacies, privacy, copyright, data security and long-term preservation of their own records.

- use the flexibility offered by Oak Grove Library Center to redeploy library on-campus space to meet changing preferences and activities of students.
 - implement a RFID inventory control system to improve customer service in Main Library.
 - recruit a User Experience Librarian to evaluate library systems, coordinate assistive services, and plan user focused improvements.
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Elevate Global Academic Reputation and Presence

The libraries and press make major contributions to Northwestern University's global reputation and presence, especially in three domains. The Herskovits Library of African Studies, also the locus for Middle East and Islamic studies; The Transportation Library, an internationally respected interdisciplinary hub linking science, engineering, history, business, and economics; and our 20th Century Music collection, supporting contemporary music theory, performance studies, jazz composition, and the musical stage. The libraries are also a global leader in the development of open source software that promotes the dissemination and preservation of the scholarly record in visual images, music, film and media.

The NU Press has garnered global recognition for its translations of literature and scholarship published in other countries. Recent prizes for NU Press authors and books enhance the university's reputation across the academy and public humanities worldwide. Both the 2018 and 2019 winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature (Olga Tokarczuk and Peter Handke) were published by NU Press. The press is expanding its presence in critical ethnic studies and critical theory with a distinctly multinational focus, particularly on the global south. The press also adds to the global reach of the university by selling books on six continents, in both print and digital formats.

In 2020 we will:

- sustain the Herskovits Library of African Studies and ensure its place as the world's preeminent, multidisciplinary library of historical and contemporary African studies.
- develop expertise around metrics that track the research impact of university faculty, and seek ways in which the libraries can ensure that impact is being maximized.
- expand the NU Press e-books program to China, and sustain a robust program of translation publishing.
- build new collaborations among the libraries, the press, and the Buffett Institute through our membership on the Global Council.

Improve Organizational Excellence

The libraries and press seek to sustain and grow our contributions in a way that ensures continuing relevance to the university's mission, ambitions, and excellence. In the past few years we have sought to transform the culture and structure of our organizations, aspiring to be employers of choice and developers of a new generation of information services leaders. Aiding in the attraction and retention of a diverse range of new professionals is our record of staff redesign resulting in the creation of positions supporting emerging specialties such as digital publishing, research data management, digital archiving and preservation services. Building on the results of the campus staff engagement survey and other assessment efforts, we have made changes to the way public services units are organized and work together. The new arrangement provides an energetic mixture of experienced and new leadership focused on user engagement, research support, access services, and curriculum support services. In strengthening our internal support, a priority is seamless access through the continued improvement of library spaces on campus, and the redeployment of collections and services across multiple locations.

In 2020 we will:

- increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in the information services professions by hosting a third year of the Association of Research Libraries' Initiative to Recruit a Diverse Workforce ([Kaleidoscope](#)), activate our membership in the Association of College & Research Libraries Diversity Alliance, participate in the Mellon University Press Diversity Fellowship program, and recruit a Diversity Resident Librarian.
- undertake the University program review process by fielding surveys of faculty, students, and partners, and conduct the internal and external review processes.
- ensure a dynamic student experience through improvements to the features and navigability of library spaces in Main, Deering, Mudd and Schaffner libraries.
- expand dissemination of NU Press books and ensure financial sustainability by using data from peer presses to analyze processes and streamline workflow.
- delegate responsibility for strategic project implementation to early-career librarians and staff. Senior leaders will use the strategic plan as a real-world framework for mentoring and helping selected junior leaders develop collaboration and project management skills.

Collaboration

All areas of our work are inherently collaborative; no aspect of information services today can be treated as a stand-alone organization. This includes collections, research support, facilities, acquisitions, human resources, and of course technology. We have decades of demonstrated commitment to collaborative projects on campus, regionally, nationally and internationally. We will sustain and deepen this approach. Ongoing projects cut across multiple schools and units at Northwestern, and extend to libraries regionally and globally. Notable current initiatives include:

- Academic Resource Center: With Weinberg College, the Searle Center, and others.
- Affordable Instructional Resources: Shaping campus strategies to reduce textbook costs and increase open access course resources.
- Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities: In-depth engagement via librarian fellows and programming with NU Press authors.
- Chicago Field Studies Program: Student interns at NUPress receive course credit through CFS.
- Mary & Leigh Block Museum: partner in exhibitions, publications, programs and research.
- Center for Native American and Indigenous Research: Librarian affiliates, research support, and notable new funding to digitize archival resources related to Native American education.
- Buffett Institute: Member of the Global Council and partners with the NU Press to fund a global translation prize; now exploring options for additional print and digital publishing services via NUL and NUP. Emerging programmatic collaborations related to languages and area studies.
- Northwestern Alumni Association: The Libraries and Press deliver, and seek to expand, local and national programming for NU alumni. An ongoing initiative is the NUBAA Archives which was launched amidst high-profile commemorations of protest events on campus in 1968.

Regionally:

- Big Ten Academic Alliance – foundational collaboration for collections, training, and scholarly communications; pursue new strategies and national advocacy related to all of these areas. Recruit the Associate Librarian for Collections and Consortia to strengthen these collaborations.
- Evanston: To develop a wider community of practice around digital citizenship, NUL has new partnerships with District 65, Evanston Township High School, and Evanston Public Library.

- Chicago Collections Consortium and Black Metropolis Research Consortium: NUL is a founding member of both projects and NUL librarians are currently in leadership roles at both.
- Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI): enables discounts on databases, resource sharing, and projects for digitizing and preservation; we will participate in a new grant-funded initiative to assess library impact on student success.

University Libraries Mission and Values

Our mission:

The mission of Northwestern University Libraries is to provide information resources and services of the highest quality to sustain and enhance the University's teaching, research, professional, and performance programs. The Libraries provide a setting conducive to independent learning and a resource for users both within the Libraries and throughout the University and broader scholarly communities. We are committed to meeting the needs of users by taking a leadership role in linking the University to information in a rapidly changing environment. The Libraries develop innovative strategies to educate users and to select, organize, provide access to, and preserve information resources. We forge effective partnerships outside the Libraries to connect users with the resources they need.

Our organization:

We are a learning organization committed to creative solutions that meet rapidly changing user needs. Our spaces, services, and operations encourage learning and growth. We build assessment into our plans and embrace failure to advance innovation. We learn from and engage the Northwestern community extending beyond our library walls.

Our values:

Collaboration & Teamwork: We engage with colleagues across boundaries, helping and supporting each other not just within teams or projects, but throughout the organization. Central to this value is generating and sharing creative ideas that lead to innovation.

Trust & Honesty: We act with integrity and respect. Central to this value is a transparent work environment where we hold each other accountable, share feedback without fear, and are empowered to make decisions.

Communication: We develop clarity about what we can expect or is needed from one another through openly sharing knowledge and active listening. Central to this value is assuming good will to develop an understanding of each other's perspectives in order to carry our work forward.

Adaptability: We seek improvement by encouraging growth and learning from failure. Central to this value is cultivating a solution-driven environment that is flexible to meet immediate needs and evolve over time.

User Focused: We connect with users in a friendly and empathetic manner in an environment that fosters teaching and learning. Central to this value is our desire to make resources accessible, build relationships across the university, and serve others.

Our current [organizational chart](#), [measures of impact](#), [policies](#) and [publications](#) are openly accessible at our website.