

# LIBRARIAN-RESEARCHER FUSION: Flipping the Pages to a Knowledge-Sharing Adventure

SUZANNE STAPLETON / AGRICULTURE SCIENCES & DIGITAL SCHOLARSHIP LIBRARIAN

PATRICIA TAKACS / POLITICAL SCIENCE LIBRARIAN



Patti Takacs in the Libraries.



Suzanne Stapleton presenting a workshop.

Librarians are known to provide great assistance to researchers. Less widely known is that librarians are researchers, too.

Librarians at the University of Florida (UF) are tenure-track faculty, with all associated responsibilities. Librarians contribute to institutional governance, provide for-credit instruction, and conduct research. In fact, 36% of the 73 library faculty earned PhDs in disciplines outside of library science. Several hold joint faculty appointments in departments across campus. The contributions of librarians as academic partners increased in 2007 when **Judy Russell** was appointed the first Dean of University Libraries. “I think it’s been a real value to the library to have elevated the position [of head of libraries] to an academic dean position.”<sup>1</sup>

Faculty status was conferred on all librarians who served as department heads by 1940.<sup>2</sup> Today, all library faculty have earned advanced degrees in Library and Information Science and/or

graduate degrees in subject areas related to their library responsibilities. Experience in conducting research themselves significantly enhances librarians’ ability to assist other researchers.

The expanding role of librarians as researchers is also evident in the organization of the Libraries. **Val Minson**, Associate Dean of Research, oversees the newest library department, Academic Research & Consulting Services (ARCS). ARCS addresses the expanding needs of UF researchers by providing librarians trained in emerging research methodologies and tools, including informatics and data science.

## Current examples of Research by Librarians

How do students determine what information is credible in the overwhelming amount of online information? **Amy Buhler** and **Tara Cataldo** lead a multi-institutional research team to investigate how students evaluate information sources they discover via Google. The research team created a mock Google

1 Learning the Libraries: Smathers Libraries at the University of Florida [podcast], December 20, 2024. [open.spotify.com/episode/6YWfQp5aEiJPcBob9Xu3ZK?si=6ddee9726513429c.a](https://open.spotify.com/episode/6YWfQp5aEiJPcBob9Xu3ZK?si=6ddee9726513429c.a)

2 Kislring, Jr., V. N. (2007) First Library and Professional Development, 1918-1937, [communications.uflib.ufl.edu/at-a-glance/smathers-library-history/first-library-and-professional-development-1918-1937](https://communications.uflib.ufl.edu/at-a-glance/smathers-library-history/first-library-and-professional-development-1918-1937). Or link to archived webpages in UFDC at [ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00053107/000001/pdf](https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00053107/000001/pdf).

environment and studied 175 students, from elementary through college age, as they found information on invasive pythons in the Florida Everglades. Results identified instruction needs for different student populations, led to advice for publishers to clarify information display, and developed new methodology in user experience research. This work was funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Science for \$491,822 between 2015-2019. For more information, see [guides.uflib.ufl.edu/RSIC](https://guides.uflib.ufl.edu/RSIC).

For a thousand years, the Jewish community of Fustat (old Cairo) stored worn or outdated sacred texts in a sacred storeroom, a genizah. In *The Cairo Genizah and the Age of Discovery in Egypt: the History and Provenance of a Jewish Archive*, **Dr. Rebecca Jefferson**, Curator of the Isser and Rae Price Library of Jewish Studies, reconstructs the story of how fragments of Hebrew manuscript treasures were recovered from hiding. Her research provides unparalleled insight into the antiquities trade and the formation of academic library collections. The Isser and Rae Price Library of Judaica has grown as a result of two National Endowment for the Humanities Challenge Grants, most recently raising funds for a \$2 million endowment.

New computational capabilities and recognition of bias has led to a modern form of literature review, known as systematic review. Systematic reviews are one type of evidence synthesis where transparency and reproducibility are key, and researchers follow methods to minimize bias. Systematically finding then objectively and comprehensively synthesizing what is already known on a topic is crucial to practitioners and policymakers. Librarians, as methodological experts, contribute as co-authors to evidence syntheses. One recent example is a systematic review of health literacy among Spanish-speakers in the U.S., co-authored by **Hannah Norton**.<sup>3</sup> **Lauren Adkins** leads a community of practice in systematic reviews among UF librarians. For more information, see [guides.uflib.ufl.edu/SR/isitrightforyou](https://guides.uflib.ufl.edu/SR/isitrightforyou).

**Dr. Ginessa Mahar** is working to restore collaborative relationships between researchers and Native American communities by contributing to the Archive of Native American Recorded History, utilizing a \$200,000 grant from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and support from the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums. Over 6,000 recordings from 160 Native American tribes across North America are being digitized, transcribed,

and indexed. The lives and histories of Native American communities who remained in the southeastern U.S. following the Indian Removal Act are included. Mahar explains, “This grant funding provides an opportunity for us as a repository to ensure our Indigenous collections are being managed in a meaningful way. Through this project, we have been able to reconnect with the original Tribal communities and work with them directly to prioritize culturally responsible curation and access.” Read more at [guides.uflib.ufl.edu/NAOH](https://guides.uflib.ufl.edu/NAOH).

Libraries offer programs to nurture the development of research expertise. The Special Opportunity Project (SOP) assists early-career librarians in exploring new research ideas and developing grants management experience. Libraries' Grants Program Manager, **Jane Barnwell**, describes these internal funding opportunities as “a way to tiptoe into the funded research world.” Participants gain confidence and expertise to then seek external research awards. A standard operating procedure exploring oral history transcription tools provided background expertise that contributed to Mahar’s successful award described above. The Smathers Libraries also support the development of research skills in students through Undergrad-

uate and Graduate Student Internship programs.

Librarians with distinguished research are recognized by professional societies. **Dr. Rachael Elrod** and **Dr. Brittany Kester** have been honored with the 2024 American Library Association’s Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table Multicultural Award for their article, “Room for Improvement: Picture Books Featuring BIPOC Characters, 2015-2020,” published in *Publishing Research Quarterly*. Their article examines trends in the representation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) characters in children’s picture books based on data from the Diverse Book Finder ([diversebookfinder.org/](https://diversebookfinder.org/)). The research underscores the importance of providing diverse narratives to enhance cultural awareness and understanding.

**Librarians’ expertise as researchers has led to substantial external funding and enriched the academic community. In 2023-2024, active research in the libraries engendered over \$1,700,000 in external awards.**<sup>4</sup>

3 Hernandez J, Demiranda L, Perisetla P, Andrews L, Zhang K, Henderson R, Mittal A, Norton HF, Hagen MG. (2024) A systematic review and narrative synthesis of health literacy interventions among Spanish speaking populations in the United States. *BMC Public Health*. 2024 Jun 27;24(1):1713. doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-19166-6

4 Avelino, A. & MacKay-Ratliff, T. (2024). Smathers Libraries 2023-2024 Annual Report. original-ufdc.uflib.ufl.edu/IR00012253/00001