

From the Editors

Introduction to Volume 15, Issue 1

The co-editors of *Practical Academic Librarianship* (PAL) are deeply saddened by the recent announcement that the Special Libraries Association (SLA), after 116 years of service to the library and information profession, has begun the process of dissolution. SLA has long been a cornerstone of professional development and community for librarians and information professionals working in specialized settings, offering vital opportunities for networking, continuing education, advocacy, and the dissemination of practical knowledge. Its contributions to the profession – from championing innovation to fostering leadership – have had a lasting impact on generations of information professionals and the institutions they serve and has been a treasured professional home for both of us over the years.

Since its founding in 2011 under the SLA umbrella, PAL has provided an invaluable platform for research-informed, practice-based scholarship in academic and research librarianship. While this news raises many questions about the future of SLA-supported initiatives, including PAL, we remain committed to exploring pathways to continue the journal's publication and mission. We believe strongly in the importance of sustaining the values and work of organizations like SLA, and we are hopeful that its legacy can be preserved through strategic partnerships or a merger with a like-minded professional body.

Now more than ever, we need to remain positive and committed to our colleagues and the important work we do. As the higher education climate continues to change at lightning pace, it can be easy to fall into disillusionment and apathy. However, it is crucial that we continue to be our own best advocates - both among ourselves and to those outside libraries. *Practical Academic Librarianship* is just one way that we can communicate all the invaluable, outstanding work being done by ourselves and our colleagues.

In this issue we have two "In Practice" pieces. In "What Should We Do Next? Designing an Innovation Portfolio for Academic Libraries," Brian Mathews provides valuable insights on how to deal with ever-changing information environments in strategic planning via structured frameworks including the Innovation Matrix and the Three Horizons framework (see also Mathews' previous think piece, "Thinking Around

the Box: Using Complementary Innovation for Designing Programs and Nurturing Community,” in the Vol. 14, No. 2 issue of PAL). Stephen Krueger raises the awareness of integration of gender inclusion in libraries, broadly understood as ensuring that no library patron or employee has worse experiences than others based on their gender, in the thoughtful essay, “How to Gender Include.”

In “A Battle of the Chatbots: An Exploratory Comparison of ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, Claude, Perplexity and HuggingChat,” author Karen Okamoto compares the free versions of six generative AI chatbots, focusing on response length, tone, and additional features like citations, web links, and follow-up questions. The findings highlight the value of using multiple chatbots and regularly reassessing their capabilities in a rapidly evolving AI landscape.

Fort Hays State University Libraries, which supports students and faculty at two partner campuses in China, conducted a survey in 2022 to evaluate these students’ awareness, usage, and satisfaction with library resources and services. Survey results indicated high levels of awareness and satisfaction with online resources, instructional materials, and the Ask-A-Librarian service. However, a mismatch emerged between students’ self-reported usage and actual usage data, potentially due to cultural differences and translation issues. The article, “Assessing Awareness and Use of Library Services within Chinese Partner Academic Programs: A Case Study Developing and Analyzing Bilingual Surveys” discusses survey results and takeaways.

Finally, while the pandemic is hopefully far in the rear-view mirror, the lessons we gained from it are still fresh. In “Studying our Progress: Assessing our New Combined Service Desk at the End of the Covid-19 Pandemic,” librarians at a small Midwestern university library analyze the impact of merging the circulation and reference desks into a single service point just before the Covid-19 pandemic, which delayed assessment of the change. A subsequent research project addresses two key objectives: to evaluate the working conditions and experiences of library staff at the combined desk, and to understand patrons’ perceptions of services, resources, customer service, and overall service delivery under the new configuration.

Looking forward, we welcome the opportunity to publish your submissions! We have one more issue planned for publication this year and are actively preparing for 2026. We are still interested in publishing think pieces about midcareer invention – the significant shift, innovation, or reinvention that occurs during the middle phase of a person's professional life. Rather than continuing along a predictable or linear career path, individuals who engage in mid-career invention might take on new roles, launch

new initiatives, or pivot entirely to pursue different interests or challenges. We want to hear your reinvention stories and any other interesting projects, research, or ideas you would like to share.

As always, we hope you enjoy this issue of *Practical Academic Librarianship* and welcome your comments and suggestions!

Ms. Jennifer Bartlett and Dr. Stacey Greenwell
Co-Editors, Practical Academic Librarianship