



# Transformations:

Smith College Libraries in the 21st Century

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**Smith College Libraries**

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# INTRODUCTION

It is 2016 and the academic library is alive and well. A thriving community of libraries and librarians across the globe are reimagining the concept of the library and its role in higher education. Digital access to information has become the expectation and the standard, while the availability of digital surrogates inspires greater interest in book and archival studies. Academic libraries are addressing critical social problems such as preservation of the born-digital record, the high price of scholarly communication, and the need for 21st century digital literacy for all global citizens.

## **Libraries have reaffirmed their essential role in academia while providing continuity in the midst of change.**

The Smith College Libraries are members of this community of thought and action. Among our peer institutions we are distinguished by our excellent collections built over many years through strong faculty engagement in the collection-building process; our extensive and unique special collections; the extent of our library system, which **includes** specialized libraries for art, performing arts and science; our strong information literacy program; and our Book Studies and Archives concentrations, which bring students into a higher level of scholarly engagement with the libraries.

These areas of excellence have defined the Smith Libraries for many years. We are now embarking on a period of crucial change and evolution to sustain that excellence for the future. Three years ago we began a reorganization of our staffing structure, resulting in four new units which address key strategic areas: Discovery & Access, Digital Strategies & Services, Teaching Learning & Research, and a unified Special Collections bringing together the Sophia Smith Collection, College Archives and Mortimer Rare Book Room under one umbrella. The new structure emphasizes functional units over more traditional, place-based library organizational structures, enabling greater collaboration across Smith's Libraries.

The new Neilson Library building offers us an unprecedented opportunity to discuss the varied purposes of the library and to imagine new directions through place-based transformations of services, tools and collections.

The Neilson Library project is also now underway. The building will be substantially redesigned, reinvented and rebuilt, a process that is bringing together the entire Smith community in consideration of the uses of library space. Although libraries increasingly exist online, physical library buildings remain vital to their campuses: they hold

content, provide a place for connections to happen, and bring together the scholarly

community of the college. Re-envisioning the physical space of Neilson makes visible and further enables our move toward broad and varied collaboration across departmental and campus expertise which rich and dynamic scholarship necessitates.

Along with these changes comes a new set of aspirational goals for what we hope to achieve for the Libraries as a whole. We believe that libraries are transforming, and that our libraries will transform Smith. These transformations bring new ways of working to our libraries, and they take place within the context of the broad roles of **Content**, **Connection** and **Community** that the Libraries have always played and will continue to play on campus. We will continue to provide **content** that students and faculty need, foster **connections** between people and content, and create a **community** of scholars through virtual and physical spaces. In fulfilling these roles we embrace continuity along with change. The core purpose of the Libraries endures even as we explore radically new ways of fulfilling these roles that take advantage of the technological and pedagogical opportunities open to us today.

The transformed library is essential to the goals that Smith will be setting for itself through its strategic planning process in such areas as design thinking, entrepreneurship, data science, sustainability, and global studies. Our changes reflect the way that higher education as a whole continues to reinvent itself in response to a changing world. Just as this reinvention is an ongoing process, transforming the libraries will entail cycles of prototyping and experimentation. The libraries of the future will embrace dynamic change as a constant in our work.

### The Smith Libraries are transforming towards:

- Closer partnerships with other staff across campus who support the use of technology in teaching, learning and research.
- Collaboration with faculty and students throughout the entire research process--from idea formation, to creation, to archiving and disseminating results.
- Being an agent of change in teaching and learning by enabling new practices in the classroom and curriculum.
- Modeling best practices in innovation and sustainability.

### Library services will transform the student experience by:

- Providing content in multiple formats to enable robust research and innovative scholarship.
- Promoting students as exemplary scholars by embedding information and digital literacies into the curriculum of all majors and programs at Smith.
- Teaching the thoughtful use of technology for the creation of new knowledge, especially in digital formats.
- Providing a welcoming dynamic space for teaching and learning outside of the classroom, transforming Neilson Library to offer the full range of tools needed for all students to do their work.

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# ENVISIONING THE LIBRARY OF THE FUTURE

In our envisioned future the core areas of **content**, **connection** and **community** would drive innovation in our work.

Our ideal 21st century library would meet the aspirational goals described here, providing a program of robust services and collections that transform the Libraries and transform Smith.



## C I CONTENT

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The quality of a library was once measured by the number of printed books in the collection. Now quality is measured by how well we create networks of global content while curating local collections of rare and unique material. Through an accessible, sustainable digital library and through strategic partnerships with other libraries, libraries can now offer access to a much wider range of material than ever before possible--both print and digital. At the same time, digital libraries stimulate interest in physical cultural collections. The digital surrogate inspires students to want to see and handle physical objects, while shared metadata makes local collections easier to locate and discover.

## In Smith's Library of the Future:

**Students and faculty have access to a comprehensive digital library of material from, by, and about the Smith community. Smith's extraordinary collections and significant scholarly activity are available online.**

- The Sophia Smith Collection, College Archives and Mortimer Rare Book Room collections are digitized and accessible through robust search tools. Grant-funded projects have made it possible to digitize vast amounts of material, including unique Smith collections such as the YWCA material. Scholars from around the world can interact with these collections online.
- Digital material -- from donor collections and from College Records -- can be routinely collected, managed, reliably preserved and made accessible through implementation of community-wide tools such as ArchivesSpace, Fedora, and Archivematica.
- Digital content remains accessible in perpetuity through a sustainable digital asset management system developed through the Three College Digital Library Project.
- The scholarly output of the Smith community, including faculty articles, student theses, presentations and other works, is captured and made available through Smith Scholarworks, our institutional repository. Through ScholarWorks the work of the college is accessed worldwide, raising the profile of Smith.
- The Libraries work closely with other units around campus to ensure that research data produced at Smith is collected and preserved. The Libraries' post-doctoral fellowship in Data Curation encourages the development of rich data management practices and preservation in the liberal arts college environment.

**The Smith Libraries collaborate with other libraries and organizations to create a vast shared digital and print collection that is accessible worldwide.**

- Strong consortial relationships and memberships have increased our access to a large body of digitized and print material, bringing the resources of a much larger research library to Smith. Through the Center for Research Libraries we can borrow foreign newspapers on microfilm, as well as foreign dissertations and other material that we could not afford to own ourselves. Our membership in HathiTrust gives us full-text digital downloads of public domain books as well as in-copyright books when needed for disability services. Membership in consortia strengthens our ability to make print material available and to acquire online subscriptions.

- Cooperative preservation projects such as the Eastern Academic Scholars' Trust allow us to be confident that a complete regional collection of print material will be available for the future.
- We support and create opportunities for sustainable open access publishing. We contribute to cooperative open access initiatives such as Knowledge Unlatched, Lever Initiative, and Open Book Publishers, and build our own open access archive of Smith scholarship with ScholarWorks.
- Digitized content and metadata from our Special Collections is contributed to the Digital Public Library of America, the Internet Archive, and other large-scale national projects, allowing our collections to be widely discovered and accessed by scholars elsewhere and allowing our scholars to search our material alongside global libraries of content.
- Grant initiatives with other institutions allow the development of specialized digital portals such as College Women, a searchable collection of diaries, letters, scrapbooks, and photographs from the archives of the Seven Sisters colleges.

**The printed word remains central to our academic programs, including the Book Studies and Archives concentrations. Manuscript and archival collections continue to grow, enabling new directions in the curriculum and research.**

**Online and physical library collections fill the unique research needs of the Smith community, changing over time as scholarship evolves at the college.**

- Advances in data-driven collection assessment help us understand patterns of use and how our collections overlap with those of consortial partners, enabling the best possible use of our collections budget.
- Tools for demand-driven acquisition allow us to quickly purchase ebooks, streaming video and other material and make it available when needed. We offer a gateway to a large collection of resources and allow students and faculty to choose what they need when they need it, including a broader array of accessibility options.
- We use our collections budget to strike the right balance of book purchasing, database and journal licensing, and acquisition of tools to improve access and delivery of collections. Innovative tools provide users with enhanced searching and the ability to create personalized collections of material.

## C II CONNECTION

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Librarians serve as teachers, guides, counselors and advisors to students and faculty to help them connect with the riches of the Libraries' collections. Central service desks in the Libraries' physical space have always provided users with a point for assistance, but these are being superseded by a wider array of services including the creation or management of discovery interfaces, the teaching of digital scholarship and instructional technology tools, and the promotion of a nuanced concept of information literacy as a framework essential to lifelong learning.

## In Smith's Library of the Future:

### **Discovery of content is enhanced by tools developed by our librarians working cooperatively as part of the worldwide library community.**

- Our reliance on commercial tools has decreased as we use open source and community-built alternatives customized for Smith and the Five Colleges. The Visual Browse tool allows users to access enhanced content and build their own unique virtual collections of library materials.
- Library content is leveraged to create Open Educational Resources, reducing textbook costs for students. The library's licensed content can be easily incorporated to create alternatives to traditional textbooks, and librarians work with colleagues in Educational Technology Services to help Smith faculty build blended learning resources and online course content.
- The Libraries' websites and information resources are optimized for future generations of mobile device technology. A major website redesign leverages responsive design to make our search tools and content accessible on any type of device.
- User experience testing allows us to engage in ongoing improvements to our interfaces and services. User experience principles infuse our day-to-day practice.

### **Innovative library services enable creation and the making of new knowledge, supported by close collaborations between the library and its key partners.**

- The Libraries incorporate interdisciplinary makerspaces and visualization environments that work hand-in-hand with more specialized spaces around campus. The Libraries' makerspaces are not owned by any discipline or department and are open to students in any class or for extracurricular needs. They evolve and change over time to include new tools and services. The KnowledgeLab project offers a unique environment where prototypes can grow from even the most unlikely idea.
- Digital scholarship thrives in the Libraries' physical and virtual space, with tools and staff expertise in place to support students and faculty in creating their own projects using virtual exhibits, textual and data analysis and GIS. The library staff works with colleagues from Educational Technology Services, the Spatial Analysis Lab, Science Center, Imaging Center and other units, with the library's focus on incorporating research into digital and physical making. Together we form the network of expertise needed to incorporate digital scholarship into the curriculum.

**Teaching and learning are central to the library's mission.**

- All librarians and archivists are skilled teachers. Moving beyond teaching technical searching skills, we connect with students in multiple ways (face-to-face, online) at their point of need to help them synthesize, create, and disseminate research. We help students understand their place in the information world and how they can exist in it as scholars.
- We collaborate with faculty to foster experiential learning, enhanced engagement with scholarship, and the creation of new knowledge within and across traditional disciplines. Students in all majors are introduced to information literacy concepts early in their Smith career, gain a firm grasp of how to do research in their chosen discipline, and graduate with fluency in digital literacies and digital modes of working.
- The Archives and Book Studies concentrations create future leaders in the profession by giving these students opportunities for meaningful work within the Smith libraries. The concentrations enrich both the student experience and the Libraries' peer-to-peer services. Students' final projects, such as the Women of Rock Oral History Collection, actively shape the libraries' archival collections. All students learn to be productive stewards of their own cultural heritage.
- Smith's open educational efforts--including our massive open online course *Psychology of Political Activism: Women Changing the World*-- are supported by the Libraries' strong unique collections. We contribute to the democratization of knowledge within and beyond the college by connecting Smith scholarship to students of all ages, backgrounds and expertise from around the world.
- As students engage with information in increasingly complex ways, and as the practices of teaching, learning and research continue to overlap, librarians and archivists work with each other and our partners across campus to help students develop the multimodal literacies (critical, digital, visual, media) they need to become global citizens.

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## C III COMMUNITY

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The physical library space creates a community of learners that is inviting to the entire campus. Users come to the Libraries seeking a free, open, and non-judgmental “third space” to work with others or alone as part of formal or informal cohorts of teaching and learning. The Libraries’ online space creates a parallel community of scholarship, where Smith scholars share their work and make it available to the world.

## In Smith's Library of the Future:

### **User-defined communities of scholarship flourish in the library space.**

- User-centered spaces in the Libraries are adaptable to the needs of individuals and groups as they change over time. The new Neilson Library has been planned with broad user input and evolves to create the right balance of types of space. The library staff is able to prototype, test and evaluate innovative uses of library space, and continuously adapt these spaces for multiple learning styles and shifting spatial needs. The new Neilson transforms Smith's immersive residential experience by providing a place for all students-- from different houses, with varied majors and interests, and of all backgrounds -- to study and work together outside of the classroom.
- Specific communities of practice arise in the Libraries around disciplines, subjects, or teaching and learning practices. Unique spaces enable these communities to come together with the tools that they need-- whether books, digital artifacts or technologies.
- Open spaces for discussions, lectures, and informal events create a welcoming place for discourse that continues beyond and flows back into the classroom. The library is recognized as a center for intellectual inquiry.

### **Online communities for freely available scholarship are curated by the Libraries and invested in by students and faculty.**

- The Smith ScholarWorks repository transforms scholarly communication at Smith by providing a place for open access articles, theses and other works to be shared with the community and the world. Altmetrics tools allow faculty to see how their scholarship is being accessed and used.
- The Libraries are recognized as a publisher of content, enabling student as well as faculty publication. Student journals can have content hosted in ScholarWorks and the Libraries take an active role in promoting, coordinating and preserving student journals. Smith follows the progress of Amherst College Press and other library publishing ventures and considers how the "library as publisher" model can serve Smith.
- The Libraries support openness in the research process and participate in national efforts to make research data and results more accessible. Data can be archived and accessed in ScholarWorks when appropriate, and librarians are skilled in advising faculty on how and where to archive their data.

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## CHALLENGES + OPPORTUNITIES

Along with our hopes for the future come significant challenges that we will need to meet in order to realize the transformed library. Engaging with these challenges requires creative and thoughtful consideration of limited resources and the channeling of resources in directions that create the most impact.

- A significant amount of the Libraries' unique Special Collections material remains unprocessed and unavailable to researchers. This material--estimated at just under 50% of the total collection--languishes in a collections backlog where it is not discoverable. The scale of the problem would require an unprecedented investment in library staffing to substantially reduce it.
- Special Collections needs to implement current, industry-standard collections management practices in order to ensure long-term preservation of physical and digital content and to improve researchers' ability to access and use collections into the future.
- Helping students and faculty understand the legal use of information is increasingly challenging. Having an in-house knowledge of copyright and intellectual property concepts will be even more important as we begin to make content available through Creative Commons licenses in ScholarWorks. As copyright case law evolves, we will need to develop more in-house expertise and easily referenceable, standard practices for clearance and stewardship.
- More digital collections are being offered as part of complicated "package deal" subscriptions with business models that are difficult to follow and understand. We will need to devote additional staff time to managing subscriptions and advocating for change with our vendors.
- Circulation of books from the regular collection continues to decline every year. This is consistent with the experiences of other academic libraries, and is a phenomenon that we need to understand better. Why is this happening, and what does it say about the research that students are doing?
- New skills within the library staff are needed to realize the vision: programming, assessment, teaching, instructional technology, data curation and stewardship, and digital scholarship expertise will all be important. We will need to hire for and develop these skills.

- Constantly changing technology makes it hard for us to keep up and to compete with commercial tools which may serve immediate student needs but hamper the open and free exchange of information. We will need to wisely assess when to employ or even leverage the use of these tools in order to extend our own resources to best advantage – and when to do so would conflict with our core mission.
- As pioneers of digital knowledge and stewards of earlier forms, we are responsible for supporting an unprecedented span of formats and practices. All staff in the library will need resilience, patience, curiosity, and the human skills to work with a user population bringing highly varied needs, experiences and practices.

**The pace of change in libraries seems unlikely to relent over the coming decades. Library staff and leadership will need to lead and manage change for the organization and for its users.**

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## CONCLUSION

Change in the 21st century library entails a cycle of transformation based on analysis, design, experimentation, evaluation and redesign. The library will not reach a new point of stasis but will continue to create transformational change. Some projects and activities described here may never happen or may happen in another form-- but change is here to stay.

**The space of the library will continue to be one that expands intellectual boundaries, encourages all to participate equally in dynamic scholarly exchange, and fosters bold creativity.**

At the same time, libraries represent continuity in the values we hold and the core purposes that we serve. The cultural and historical importance of the printed book is central to Smith's curriculum and to the passions of its students, faculty, staff, librarians, and archivists. Digitization will enhance but not replace the use of our significant archival and rare book collections. The Libraries will continue to serve as a center of teaching and learning outside of the classroom, with an intentional focus on improving pedagogy through technology and through thoughtful exploration of our role as teachers.

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