



INTERVIEW

WITH BETH MCNEIL

Beth McNeil is the Dean of Libraries and Esther Ellis Norton Professor of Library Science at Purdue University.



Beth McNeil

What brought you to Purdue?

Opportunity! This is my second time at Purdue, and both times I came for the opportunity. I first came to Purdue in 2007 as a faculty member and associate dean in the Libraries. My position then was associate dean

for scholarly communication and collections, and was an opportunity for me to take on a leadership position in an area where I had not yet led. Prior to Purdue I held the position of associate dean in the libraries at University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where I had responsibilities for technical services, staff development, assessment, and a variety of other areas during the eleven years I was at Nebraska. The associate dean role at Purdue was an opportunity to learn something new and join an active, engaged faculty. Plus, the dean then, Dr. James L. Mullins, was leading Purdue Libraries into some very interesting data management directions. I was looking for a next challenge, and Purdue looked exciting and interesting. When I came back to Purdue in July 2019, it was for a very similar reason: the opportunity to work with a faculty engaged in exciting teaching and research in a new school of information studies and to lead the Libraries into a future that best meets Purdue's information needs.

What do you enjoy most about being Dean of Purdue University Libraries and School of Information Studies?

As a librarian, I love putting information into the hands and heads of those who need it. However, as a dean, more of my time is spent talking about all things LSIS, to campus members, to community members, to many loyal Purdue alumni and supporters, and of course to LSIS faculty and staff. In addition to the exciting initiatives happening in our many libraries, I also talk about the Purdue University Press and what it is publishing, undergraduate research and what is happening with the Office of Undergraduate Research, and try to connect the courses we offer in the new School of Information Studies with priority areas for Purdue, so that we can grow our course enrollments and offerings.

What are some underutilized aspects of Purdue Libraries that more students should take advantage of?

Our Libraries are such active, engaging spaces, full of students and others working together on exciting projects, as well as students studying independently using library resources, that it is a bit of a challenge to think of what services or collections might be underutilized. Perhaps some of our newer initiatives would fit this—digital humanities is an exciting aspect of the broad digital scholarship, and we have some talented faculty leading digital humanities projects, research, and teaching courses in this area. In the area of data science our faculty work closely with many other faculty and graduate students on data life cycle, data management plans,

and other data-related areas. I hope that we can attract more undergraduate students to our data courses, as building data skills and data literacy is so critical for today's citizens. Another area where our faculty are leading on campus is in GIS efforts. I think many students know about this, but just in case I'll mention it here. One area that isn't underutilized, and in fact is quite busy (but that I always mention to students because it is so unique and important), is tucked away up on the fourth floor of the Humanities, Social Science, and Education Library in Stewart Center: the Archives and Special Collections Research Center. Purdue's history is held there, telling the stories of the experiences of our student body over time, the achievements of faculty, staff, and students, and the impact Purdue and its people have made on the world.

How important is it for undergraduates to publish their research in an open access format such as JPUR?

Publishing in an open access journal like JPUR extends a researchers' reach—to the global community, to individual scholars who may work in universities or colleges without access to journals behind paywalls, to citizens without a university affiliation searching for factual, accurate, and non-biased research on topics important to them, and to independent scientists and researchers doing life-saving research who might work for smaller start-up companies without access to subscriptions. It is very important for undergraduate researchers to consider publishing in an open, freely accessible publication like JPUR. Your research article in JPUR shows future employers and/or graduate programs that you understand the research process and can present your results in a peer-reviewed publication.

What are your ambitions for the *Journal of Purdue Undergraduate Research* going forward?

I want JPUR to continue to publish high-quality scholarship by Purdue undergraduate researchers. With the Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR) now working closely with the Libraries and School of Information Studies (LSIS) and the Purdue University Press (PUP), JPUR's publisher, the landscape is wide open for new opportunities to further promote undergraduate researchers and to make the connection between the OUR-sponsored research symposiums each semester with JPUR. When I talk with alumni and other loyal Purdue

supporters, I mention JPUR as just one example of the many innovative and exciting opportunities Purdue offers its students. I am hopeful that one day I will connect with a supporter who would like to fund the production and publication of JPUR. I believe JPUR is just that worthy of support!

What is your advice for undergraduate students interested in getting involved with research?

Do it! If you have an interest, please explore it. Purdue University maintains undergraduate research as an important priority. Between the Libraries, the Press, and the Office of Undergraduate Research, students who are interested will be able to find the help they need for any aspect of the research process, and there are many Purdue faculty members who want to work with undergraduate researchers. OUR can help you make the connection with a faculty member or lab and provide training on aspects of the research process, in the libraries you can get assistance with finding resources in support of your study, and the Press can work with you on the possibility of publishing your results in JPUR.

Interviewer



Ethan Edwards is a junior in Purdue's Honors College studying civil engineering with an environmental concentration. Edwards served as the coordinator for this volume of the *Journal of Purdue*

Undergraduate Research and on the Student Editorial Board for volumes 8 and 9. He is also involved with the Purdue Running Club, conducts water quality research at the Purdue Center for Plumbing Safety, and acts as a first-year engineering mentor for the Purdue Goss Scholars Program.