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George Stachokas
Auburn University Libraries, george.stachokas@auburn.edu

Author ORCID Identifier: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4397-9354>

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Preparing Researchers for Publishing Success: The Case of Auburn University

*George Stachokas, Electronic Resources Librarian, Auburn University Libraries,
george.stachokas@auburn.edu*

Abstract

As part of a panel discussion organized by Dr. Gwen Taylor of Wiley, this paper reviews current efforts undertaken by Auburn University Libraries to support the research enterprise at Auburn University, including preparing researchers for publishing access. Despite financial constraints, Auburn University endeavors to transition from a Carnegie Classification of R2 to R1, add 500 new faculty members by 2022, and increase research output in STEM disciplines, agriculture, allied health sciences, and cybersecurity. The Libraries are working to support all of these efforts through cost effective collection development, systematic improvements in assessment, catching up with aspirational peers by implementing best practices and programs, while exploring the potential of new services.

About Auburn University

Auburn University, located in Alabama, is a growing land, sea, and space grant university with nearly 30,000 students, over 1,300 faculty, nearly 2,400 administrative professionals, and about 1,400 staff. (Auburn University, 2017). Founded by the Methodist Church and originally chartered in 1856 as the East Alabama Male College, the State of Alabama assumed control of the campus in 1872 under the Morrill Act and renamed the institution the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Alabama. It became the Alabama Polytechnic Institute in 1899 and a comprehensive university renamed for its surrounding community in 1960.

Auburn University has a number of strong academic programs, notably in the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering, the College of Architecture, Design & Construction, and the College of Veterinary Medicine. Auburn also has strong and growing academic programs in business and nursing, as well as ongoing emphasis in agriculture, education, forestry, and pharmacy. However, Auburn University does not have a law school or a medical school. Auburn University at Montgomery is an affiliated satellite campus of roughly 5,000 students, but with separate infrastructure, including its own library and subscriptions.

Environmental Constraints

Auburn University Libraries on the Auburn campus consist of the main library, the Ralph Brown Draughon Library, and two branch libraries, the Library of Architecture, Design & Construction and the Charles Cary Veterinary Medical Library. Throughout most of the 21st century, Auburn University

Libraries have been financially challenged in comparison to other member institutions in the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). For the year 2015–2016, Auburn's expenditure of \$8.2 million on collections fell significantly below the median amount of around \$11.6 million (Morris & Roebuck, 2016). Auburn University Libraries also function with significantly fewer personnel. Auburn reported 77 total staff whereas the University of Alabama reported 142. By comparison, Iowa State University was staffed by 119 and Louisiana State University by 106 during the same time period (Morris & Roebuck, 2016).

The Libraries are even more challenged in that Auburn University has grown dramatically during the past five years with a student FTE rising from 22,812 in 2012 to 27,468 in 2018. One hundred new faculty also joined the campus from 2015 to 2017 as part of the Provost's Strategic Hiring Initiative that put pressure on the Libraries to support five new areas of interdisciplinary research ranging from the environmental sciences to alternative energy and rural health disparities. Changes in the university's administration have brought a new president and a new provost who are both committed to further growth in the research enterprise and transitioning the campus from Carnegie R2 to R1 status. The new administration has created the Presidential Awards for Interdisciplinary Research (PAIR) Grants to foster more research in cybersecurity, bioenergetics, allied health, neuroscience, agriculture, and climate change. President Steven Leath has publicly committed to bringing 500 faculty to Auburn by 2022 (Jaschik, 2018), most likely in the form of a net 100 new faculty and around 400 to replace existing faculty who are due to retire or leave Auburn through attrition.

The Libraries have undergone many changes in recent years. Within the past year, the Mell Classroom Building, a 69,000-square-foot addition to the Ralph Brown Draughton Library, together with 38,000 square feet of converted stacks space, has created 26 new classrooms with smart technology, two 166-seat lecture halls, as well as expanded learning, lounge, and study spaces throughout the two adjoining buildings. All of these changes in space, as well as the inclusion of a full-scale Panera Restaurant, have required the Libraries to rethink the use of space in general, relocate public service points, and change how staff time is used across the Libraries. Changes in personnel have also been dramatic during the past few years with the retirement of both the dean and associate dean of libraries in 2018, the reorganization of multiple units, and the pending appointment of a new dean of libraries expected sometime in 2019.

Challenges and Opportunities for the Libraries

How can the Libraries support academic research at Auburn University given all of these constraints, changes, and rising expectations? It is difficult, but we can discuss what we have done, what we are doing, and some of what we may do in the future.

Ensuring convenient access to information resources is still a critical function for the Libraries to facilitate research and publication. We are systematically doing everything possible to drive down the costs of all information resources and expand access to critical content. When the university gave some additional one-time funding to support the replacement of print journal runs with journal archives or back-files when stacks space was reduced to support the Mell Classroom project, the author in his capacity as electronic resources librarian (ERL) negotiated new license agreements that leveraged these one-time expenditures to reduce the annual cost increases for journal subscriptions. Working in collaboration with administrators and subject specialists, the ERL helped to expand the collection to include more packages for journals with high demand, canceled low-use subscriptions, shifted databases to other platforms to reduce cost or improve discovery, switched print serials to online format, negotiated standing discounts for e-book acquisitions, and explored access-only and evidence-based business models.

Auburn University Libraries are also conducting more thorough collection analysis. Some of this work

involves the more intensive and systematic use of existing tools such as overlap analysis functionality in our Serials Solutions 360 Core module or the data in Web Science that can be used for citation analysis and to help identify important journals. Personnel in both Public and Technical Services units are actively tracking the scholarly production of our research faculty in a much more systematic way. While we have not yet undertaken the systematic development of research profiles for individual faculty, Libraries personnel in multiple units are collecting data, participating in broader campus life, and engaging with faculty in order to learn more about what is needed in terms of collections to support and sustain the strong R1 institution that Auburn hopes to become.

Despite our many challenges, Auburn University Libraries is beginning to catch up with our aspirational peers in the development of critical services such as research data management. A new research data management librarian position was created in 2017 and has been filled by a very busy new colleague who is developing workshops and other training tools to help educate our faculty about data compliance. Our colleague also has an ex-officio seat on the Faculty Research Committee of the Faculty Senate in addition to the Libraries' representative. Auburn University Libraries recently acquired an institutional subscription to ORCID ID and one of our science librarians is actively promoting its use across campus. Auburn University Libraries maintains an institutional repository, AUora.

A fundamental part of how any academic library supports research and publication by faculty is in terms of the overall infrastructure of technology, personnel, and the organization of work that manages, organizes, and delivers information to users. Technical Services at Auburn University Libraries was integrated as a single department in 2014. Committed to ongoing systemic improvement, Technical Services is enlarging capacity in electronic resources management, analytics, acquisitions, and metadata services. Instead of relying only on more traditional skill sets, the head of Technical Services has developed professional positions that leverage advanced skills in IT, business, accounting, and other fields that can streamline operations and improve overall service in terms of discovery and accessibility. The author's position of electronic resources librarian is not new to libraries, but it did not exist previously in Auburn's organizational structure. One of our recent hires, an information technology specialist in Technical Services, is a computer programmer. Working in

collaboration with Library Systems, Technical Services now has much greater ability to deploy and modify relevant systems and tools that make our work more efficient and save time for busy researchers. Led by the interim dean, a Web Working Group of IT specialists from Technical Services and Systems have proposed multiple improvements to the Libraries' website that take advantage of new technology.

While awaiting permanent leadership, the Libraries have not been idle. Our interim dean has taken an active role in addressing current problems and opportunities. She has authorized the head of Technical Services to spearhead the deployment of EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS), Auburn's first Web-scale Discovery Service, while investigating other ways to improve metadata to facilitate research. Auburn University is participating, as staff are available, in the FOLIO project, a new open source system that could further improve the library's technological infrastructure while potentially reducing costs. The process of engagement includes forging new horizontal, vertical, and other relationships across campus. Our assistant dean for Technology has actively worked to facilitate direct engagement

between the Libraries and the Office of the Vice President for Research. The interim associate dean has presided over the renaming and refocusing of our former Reference and Instruction Department as the Research and Instruction Department, to help confirm our growing emphasis on research. The head of Library Systems and the Systems Department continue to engage with the university's Office of Information Technology (OIT) as the information technology infrastructure across campus is improved and expanded. As is the case with other ARL Libraries, some of our Libraries' faculty are also actively collaborating with disciplinary faculty on research in their subject disciplines.

Areas in which we hope to grow include improved analytics capabilities, developing relevant services to support grant writing, and finding ways to help faculty and graduate students document and publish their work in research with greater efficiency. We also will explore how teams of librarians in public and technical services might engage with interdisciplinary programs on campus, promoting cybersecurity, and continuously improving collections and services.

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