

THE LIBRARIES AT MASON

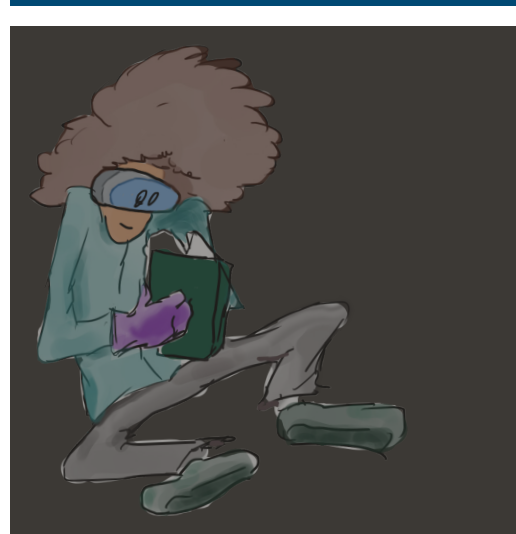
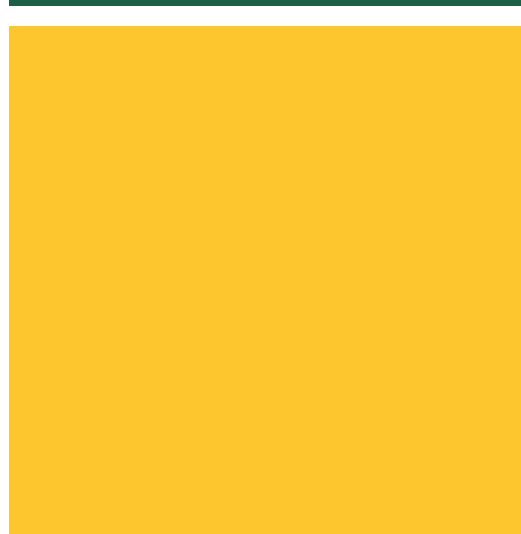
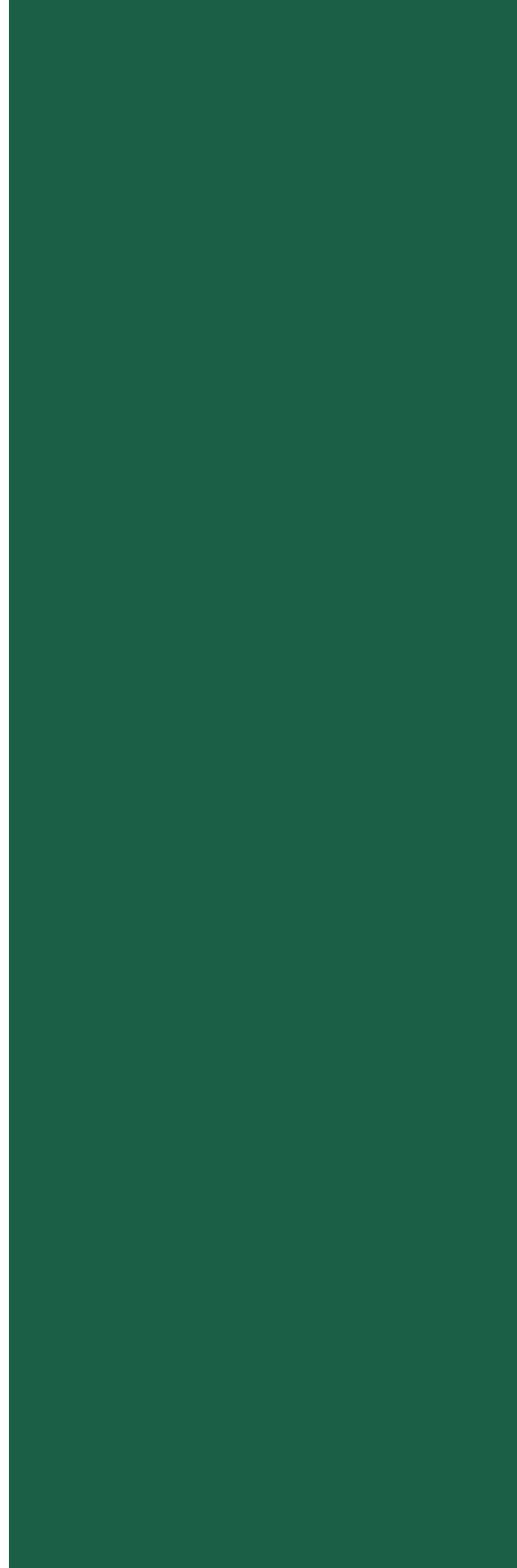
SPRING 2026

PEOPLE • RESOURCES • EVENTS



HEART OF THE UNIVERSITY

INSPIRE



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About the cover

The libraries are the heart of the university—vital, central, and organically connected to every person, entity, and function at George Mason, designed by Hannah McLaughlin.

The Libraries at Mason

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Questions or comments?
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Where better to find

Inspiration

than in a library?

Libraries are welcoming, transformative places where people come to grow and share knowledge, connect across disciplines, and gain the tools and skills needed to turn ideas into action.

In this issue, you'll see how our libraries serve as powerful engines of inspiration, from **supporting students** whose work here provides a foundation for their academic and professional journeys, to **building collections** and archives that spark new scholarship, to **advancing system-wide transformations** that reflect our commitment to reducing barriers to information. You'll also see how we are shaping the future of our library system through the hopes, ideas, and voices of our community.

Collaboration is a strong theme throughout this issue. Partnerships with the Reva and Sid Dewberry Family School of Music, Civic Fellows and Greenhouses & Gardens Programs, and School of Art and Mason Exhibitions, and many others, allow us to accomplish far more together than we ever could alone.

Through our spaces, collections, and services, we remain deeply committed to lifelong learning and the preservation of knowledge. I hope these stories inspire you, and I'd love to hear what sparks your curiosity!

-Anne C. Osterman
Dean of Libraries

From Gift to Impact

The George Mason University Libraries are celebrating two major gifts this year: a space transformation to incorporate a Family Study Space at Fenwick Library that will provide support for student parents and caregivers thanks to a generous gift from Foster Care to Success (FC2S), and the Abdulaziz Sachedina Collection of Islamic Law & Theology, a collection of books that represents decades of scholarly dedication to collecting resources from around the world and a valuable resource for students and researchers.

Foster Care to Success Gift Creates Family Study Space

FC2S's generous donation will fund the design of a family-friendly space, creating a comfortable and safe environment where students can study while the children they care for are welcome and supported.

Study room 1702 will be named the **Joseph Rivers Study Room for Families** in honor of FC2S founder Joseph Rivers, who established the organization in 1981 to support young people aging out of foster care. FC2S has been the nation's largest provider of college funding and support services for students with foster care experience. As the organization plans to sunset, executive director Eileen McCaffrey partnered with George Mason to ensure its mission continues through this transformative gift.

The New Space

The gift will fund three key improvements:

- **Family Study Room** – Student study spaces with play areas for children that are equipped with new furnishings and age-appropriate toys.
- **Children's Literature Collection** – A significantly expanded book collection supporting George Mason's College of Education and Human Development programs and community needs.
- **Family-Friendly Library Area** – A reconfigured space for the children's literature collection with accessible shelving, colorful furniture, and welcoming decorations for families.

When student parents and caregivers have places where they can learn while the children they care for are supported, they're more likely to feel part of the George Mason community and achieve success.

The Sachedina Collection: A Gift of Islamic Scholarship

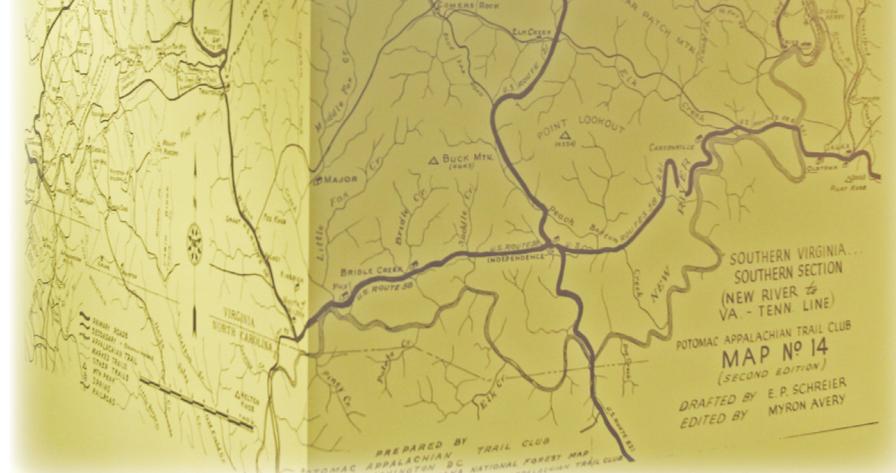
The libraries recently welcomed a remarkable donation that will become the **Abdulaziz Sachedina Collection of Islamic Law & Theology**—a collection of books that represents decades of scholarly dedication to collecting resources from around the world and a valuable resource for students and researchers. Dr. Abdulaziz Sachedina retired in 2024 after nearly fifty years of service to public higher education in Virginia. At George Mason, he served as chair of the International Institute of Islamic Thought, building bridges of understanding through rigorous scholarship and teaching.

The collection comprises over 3,000 volumes in multiple languages, including English, Persian, and Arabic, reflecting the depth and breadth of Islamic legal and theological scholarship. When David Heilbrun, Director of Discovery Services, put out a call for volunteers to help unbox and sort the materials, an enthusiastic team assembled to organize the collection—separating Romance-language materials from those requiring specialized cataloging assistance.

To ensure the collection's accessibility and growth, generous gifts were made to establish both the **Dr. Abdulaziz Sachedina Islamic Studies Collection Fund**, which will enable professional cataloging of the collection, and **The Dr. Abdulaziz Sachedina Endowment for the Libraries**, which will support acquiring additional titles in Islamic studies and funding events that encourage scholarly use of the collection.

This gift enriches the University Libraries' holdings in religious studies and Middle Eastern scholarship, providing essential resources for academic programs and research across the disciplines. It is a lasting legacy of Dr. Sachedina's commitment to education and interfaith understanding. ■

Highlights of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy Archive



In 2022, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy donated its archives, which document the history of the organization since its inception in 1925, to the University Libraries' Special Collections Research Center (SCRC). Comprised of over 700 boxes and over 100 linear feet of publications and maps, this is the largest collection within the SCRC and presents a significant challenge in processing and preservation. It has already become the most requested SCRC collection by researchers and community members in the United States and beyond.

The libraries' initial funding goal for this collection is \$150,000 to inventory, describe, and identify preservation issues for the thousands of photographic materials in the archive. This will create better access for researchers and help the SCRC assess the conservation needs of these items, which come in varied formats and states of preservation concern.

Q&A with Chris Jones, longtime Appalachian Trail volunteer and donor to the libraries' Appalachian Trail Conservancy Archive fund

What is your connection to the Appalachian Trail?

I began volunteering at the Shenandoah National Park (SNP) in 1986 with a group of friends. Our first assignment was maintenance of a very rugged trail that led to the Appalachian Trail (AT) and wound along the banks of the Staunton River. A friend at PATC sent me a book to read, "Lost People and Forgotten Trails" that talked about the early settlers along the Staunton River. In the 1800s there was a wagon road that provided the valley with goods and mail service to the settlers and hauled out produce and lumber from the forests. The name of this toll road was Wilhite Wagon Road. After much research I found that the road was owned and operated by my father's ancestors. Of course, the SNP along with many other state and national parks were built by laborers from the CCC. As a teenager, my father worked several years as a blacksmith in these parks, sending money home during the Great Depression. And now, my children and grandchildren have worked as volunteers in the SNP and continue a tradition of outdoor recreation and service to the nation's parks. From the Wilhite Wagon Road to today, that is 9 generations or more with connections to the AT and the SNP.

Chris Jones

When did you first hike any of the Appalachian Trail?

In 1986, my first visit to the AT was as a new volunteer for PATC on a qualification work trip. PATC wanted me and my son to join a work crew on the AT and on the White Oak trail (a blue blaze trail that leads to the AT along a river with many waterfalls). After a grueling day hauling a two-man crosscut saw up and down the mountains and removing several trees blown down along the AT, we were found qualified and healthy enough to accept responsibility for our own trail in the SNP. That 5 miles of volunteering spent that day led to our volunteering as Trail Supervisors on the AT and in SNP for 40 years.

You visited our exhibit of the ATC Archive. Did any items spark your interest?

I found the photographs, slides and pictures of past work crews, locals living in the SNP, and AT dignitaries to be very exciting and interesting. Looking back in time to the people, the ways of life, and the contributions of so many people with little resources, it makes the archive and history come to life.

Why is it important to preserve the history of the ATC?

The history of the ATC and the AT are not something to simply look back on and admire. It is a living connection to my ancestors and the opportunity to leave a message for future generations. For my children and grandchildren to be able to visit the archive and to introduce their children and grandchildren to this history is an opportunity for generations to communicate through time. It creates immortality for every homesteader, volunteer, and contributor that is involved with and loves the AT.

Is there anything about the Archive, or the Trail's history, that you feel people don't talk about enough?

I love the pictures of the original homesteaders and contributors, and I truly appreciate the efforts of the various organizations involved to record and present the history of the African American contribution, but I find the record of the native and original inhabitants to be lacking. Both the original people and the historical wildlife that no longer exist deserve some attention. Did you know that there are the remains of Native American villages in the SNP and along the AT? The locations are not available to the general public for security and historic preservation, but they are there, and university archeologists are involved in research and discovery. I would like more of this to be included in the archive or referenced for researchers in the future.

What inspired you to donate to the libraries' ATC Archive fund?

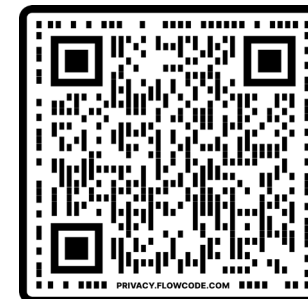
I believe my contributions to the libraries' Appalachian Trail Conservancy Archive fund will help conserve the information about the AT and the people, be a resource for future generations, and be a connection to my legacy. I can't wait for my grandchildren to take a tour of the archive because they are in it already as visitors and volunteers when they were much younger. I've got the pictures!

What do you think gets lost if these stories aren't preserved?

Not just the information, not just the historical record, but the stories of the lives of the people involved. From Native people to homesteaders, from farmers to bootleggers, from CCC construction to state and national park creation, from trail builders to hikers and campers, this is a legacy worth protecting. ■

Top left: As part of the ATC Archive exhibit, the libraries had large-scale photographs and a map printed on to the walls of Fenwick Library.

Top right: A glass magic lantern slide, one of hundreds in the AT collection.



Scan the QR code or visit scrc.gmu.edu to help support this collection.

Inspiration

comes from
all directions



The University Libraries continue to create a safe and resourceful space for the community. This past year our campuses have cultivated partnerships in many areas of the university from the Office of Community Engagement and Civic Learning (CECIL) to the artists and curators of Mason Exhibitions and finally, creating a new life for media at the College of Visual and Performing Arts (CVPA). As we strengthen our partnerships and support our community, we are excited to see the growth that's still to come in 2026. Above images, left to right: Fenwick Library, Mason Square Library, and Mercer Library.



Cultivating Collaborations at the Seed Library

By Bella Teta and Marissa Burkland

The Fenwick Seed Library was founded on a simple yet profound source of inspiration: the incredible potential contained within a single seed. Our mission goes beyond simply distributing free seeds to students, faculty, and the broader Fairfax community; we aim to cultivate a culture of sustainability, food sovereignty, and hands-on environmental education. By providing free access to open-pollinated, native, and heirloom seed varieties, we inspire our community to reconnect with the local ecosystem, understand the origins of their food, and take active, personal steps toward a more sustainable future.

We believe that true growth stems from a shared vision of community and sustainability, and it is this collective inspiration that drives how we build our partnerships. By partnering with campus entities like the Civic Fellows Program, the Fenwick Gallery, and the campus Greenhouses and Gardens, we have co-hosted dynamic events ranging from seed paper making to cyanotype workshops. These partnerships are built on a foundation of mutual inspiration, transforming our library into a vibrant, interconnected hub where art, science, and community service naturally intersect.

Patriot Green Fund

The Fenwick Seed Library is a Patriot Green Fund Project, meaning it was originally started and funded through the Patriot Green Fund (PGF). This fund is available to any GMU students, faculty, or staff who are inspired to make a positive difference in the sustainability of GMU's campuses. We worked with the PGF to order the seeds from Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, gardening how-to books, supplies for a grand opening event, and of course, the cart and packet holders that you may recognize as the Seed Library today.

The Civic Fellows Program

The Civic Fellows Program, run by the Office of Community Engagement and Civic Learning (CECIL) is a dedicated, one-year engaged service initiative designed to partner students with community-based organizations. As a Civic Fellow serving in the Fenwick Seed Library, Bella Teta committed to working alongside Marissa Burkland, Sciences & Data Librarian, throughout the academic year. This position contributed to the library's outreach efforts, inventory management, and the execution of educational events, directly supporting community-led programs.

Fenwick Gallery & School of Art

For the grand opening in April 2025, we had the wonderful opportunity of working with the Fenwick Gallery through the exhibit "Cross Pollination: an exhibition in celebration of the Seed Library at Fenwick." This exhibit explored the idea of the seed through various artworks by various professors at the School of Art. The exhibition included pieces depicting sunflowers, the trees of Puerto Rico, the deep connection of humans and Earth's systems,



Seed packets available at the Seed Library grand opening event in 2025.

and even a beehive. This collaboration included two nature inspired events as well, which became part of the larger Earth Month events.

University Greenhouses & Gardens

Given GMU's robust focus on Sustainability and Green Living, the Seed Library was able to partner on a number of fronts with the University Greenhouses & Gardens. Firstly, Doni Nolan, the Program Manager for the Greenhouse & Gardens, has always been such an inspiration and mentor for knowledge around gardening and educational programming as the Seed Library was being imagined. We've also been able to use the beautiful President's Park Greenhouse and the University Sustainability Volunteering Portal to host and post volunteer shifts for packing the small packets of seeds we give out at the Seed Library.

Fairfax Master Gardeners

The Fairfax Master Gardeners have been instrumental in the success of the Seed Library, given their large wealth of educational materials and knowledge of gardening particularly focused on the region of Fairfax County. The Seed Library website links to a number of their handouts on how to garden as well as videos, articles, and infographics. ■



Thought Provocation

Sparking Reflection at Mason Square

By Jenny Meslener

At Mason Square Library (MSL), Mason Exhibitions introduced a collection of artwork centered around the theme of ‘thought-provocation’—a concept that aligns with the spirit of a library. Rather than presenting pieces designed to offer immediate answers, they curated works that invite deeper contemplation. Each piece was selected with intention: the longer you engage with the art, the more layers and details emerge, sparking ongoing inquiry and reflection.

Inspired by the distinctive qualities of the space at MSL and the Paden Collection, Mason Exhibitions carefully curated a selection of three-dimensional pieces from their extensive African art collection. The chosen works—ranging from domestic items and ceremonial objects to warrior-related artifacts and jewelry—are designed to ignite thoughtful dialogue around themes such as daily life, identity, spirituality, and cultural heritage across the African continent. Thanks to the generous support of Stephanie Grimm, Art and Exhibitions Librarian and Book Arts Curator, display cases were relocated to MSL for this exhibit.

Mason Exhibitions selected several high-quality two-dimensional pieces, which will be displayed in both public areas and in staff spaces. There are two pieces in particular Mason Exhibitions would like to highlight: *Waiting for Jimi* by Renée Stout and a work by Eckstein. Both pieces were created in collaboration with students at the George Mason University School of Art. Through this initiative, students engaged directly in the creative process contributing to design, color selection, and printing, while learning how to collaborate with a practicing artist. These works represent the intersection of education, creativity, and community engagement. It should also be noted that Mason Exhibitions installed *The Dentist* by the prominent artist Salvador Dali.

The final piece of art displayed by Mason Exhibitions is a plaster cast of the bronze lid of a sarcophagus for a Prussian knight. The sarcophagus from which this cast was made is from an honorific dedicated to the memory of Johann Cicero and his son Joachim I, who were Hohenzollern rulers from about 1486 to 1535, direct descendants of Frederick I through the Brandenburg line. From the Hohenzollern princes would come the kingdom of Prussia, which would play a major role in shaping modern-day Europe. George Mason University acquired this plaster cast and more than sixty others as a gift from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2005.

Dynamic Dimensions: Layered Meanings in African Art is an exhibition curated by Mason Art History students of African artifacts and artworks from the George Mason University permanent collection.



Top: Image of *La Lumière de la Guérison (The Dentist)* by Salvador Dali (1904-1989);
Bottom: Image of Sarcophagus-lid of the Elector Johann Cicero of Brandenburg (1455-1499).



Obsolete Media Gets a New Life

of Creative Possibility in the Free Art Supply Cabinet

By Alex Baker

In academic libraries, deaccessioning is sometimes misunderstood as a wasteful or disruptive process. In reality, it is a routine, ongoing practice that lies at the heart of an innovative academic library in the age of information. At Mercer Library, deaccessioning is understood as the continuous evaluation and editing of collections to ensure that users can more easily find the most relevant, accurate, and useful information, as determined by subject experts. A recent deaccessioning and recycling project illustrates how this essential work can also lend itself to collaboration, sustainability, and creative reuse.

The goals of the project were to:

- 1 Improve the overall quality of items on library shelves;
- 2 Address accessibility by relocating materials that no longer serve users in their original format or location;
- 3 Avoid the risk of mis- or disinformation associated with outdated materials;
- 4 Transform library spaces to better accommodate users, programming, and evolving needs;
- 5 Refine workflows for managing deaccessioning projects at a branch library location; and
- 6 Prioritize environmentally sustainable choices whenever possible.

What made this project distinctive was the decision to look beyond traditional disposal methods. While the informational value of the withdrawn media had diminished, their physical properties, durable plastic casings, magnetic tape, and reflective discs remained mostly intact. Rather than sending hundreds of bulky items directly to landfills, the library explored ways to extend their usefulness in a new context, art. We made an offer that reframed the outcome of the project: could these nearly obsolete media items be repurposed as creative materials for students? That question was met with enthusiasm by Yassmin Salem, Program Manager for Mason Exhibitions within the College of Visual and Performing Arts (CVPA), who immediately recognized the educational and artistic potential of the materials.

Through this collaboration, a combination of more than 300 VHS tapes, audio cassette tapes, and CD-ROMs were donated to the Free Art Supply Cabinet, a freely accessible resource located in Room 2046 of the Art and Design Building. Open to students, faculty and staff at no cost, the cabinet supports equity, experimentation, expression, and sustainability. The donated materials now serve as building blocks for innovative projects, with the potential to become sculptures, and other three-dimensional artworks that challenge assumptions about technology, waste, and reuse.



A New Library Building Vision



Reimagining our spaces for today—and what’s next through community engagement

By Kat Bell

In January 2016, one of the most significant changes for University Libraries came to fruition with the opening of the Fenwick Library addition – 150,000 additional square feet to support growing collections, a growing student population, and new technology needs. Now in 2026, the libraries are embarking on a new space visioning process to identify what the George Mason community will need from us in the next ten years.

Our visioning process includes more than just bricks, furniture, and floor plans – we are updating the identity of our entire system to ensure any change is meaningful and any plans allow for flexibility, especially with recent changes at our branch libraries. The Mason Square Library in Arlington, VA underwent recent renovations that were finalized in 2024. As the SciTech campus in Manassas, VA prepares to expand, proposals for a brand new building include space for a new library on that campus.

At the heart of this vision are three guiding pillars:

- 1 User-Centric Spaces** that are designed to support the evolving needs of students, faculty, and researchers;
- 2 Institutional Stewardship** which safeguards the autonomy and integrity of library areas while embracing sustainability;
- 3 Employee Workspace Considerations** that prioritize functional collaboration and noise management to enhance the user experience.



Left to Right: Team and Students- Jeeho Sohn, Kat Bell, Christopher Rhodes, and Sherry Liao.

Work began in Fall 2025 gathering student feedback and continues into Spring 2026 with University Business Consulting (UBC) supporting feedback from faculty, staff, and stakeholders from across the university and the libraries. A report will be produced during the Summer 2026 that will include the system identity and detailed information for Fenwick Library, and additional research for Mason Square Library and Mercer Library will begin next academic year.

Joining Kat Bell, Strategic Planning and Grants Lead, Christopher Rhodes, former Facilities Manager, and Heather Garritty, Associate Dean for Administration, on the project team are graduate research assistants Sherry Liao and Jeeho Sohn. Both are working on their PhD in Industrial-Organizational Psychology and come to the libraries through a joint GRA position supported in part by the Psychology Department.

Q&A A conversation with our students

What have you learned and how has your coursework helped you in this work?

Sherry: I helped gather students’ perspectives on how they currently use library spaces and what they hope to see in the future. This involved engaging directly with students through a Johnson Center’s Booth section, designing and interpreting open-ended questions, and translating comments and suggestions into clear themes. One of the most valuable learning experiences was presenting our findings to the Dean’s Council, which challenged me to synthesize qualitative insights and communicate them clearly to senior leadership that supports strategic planning.

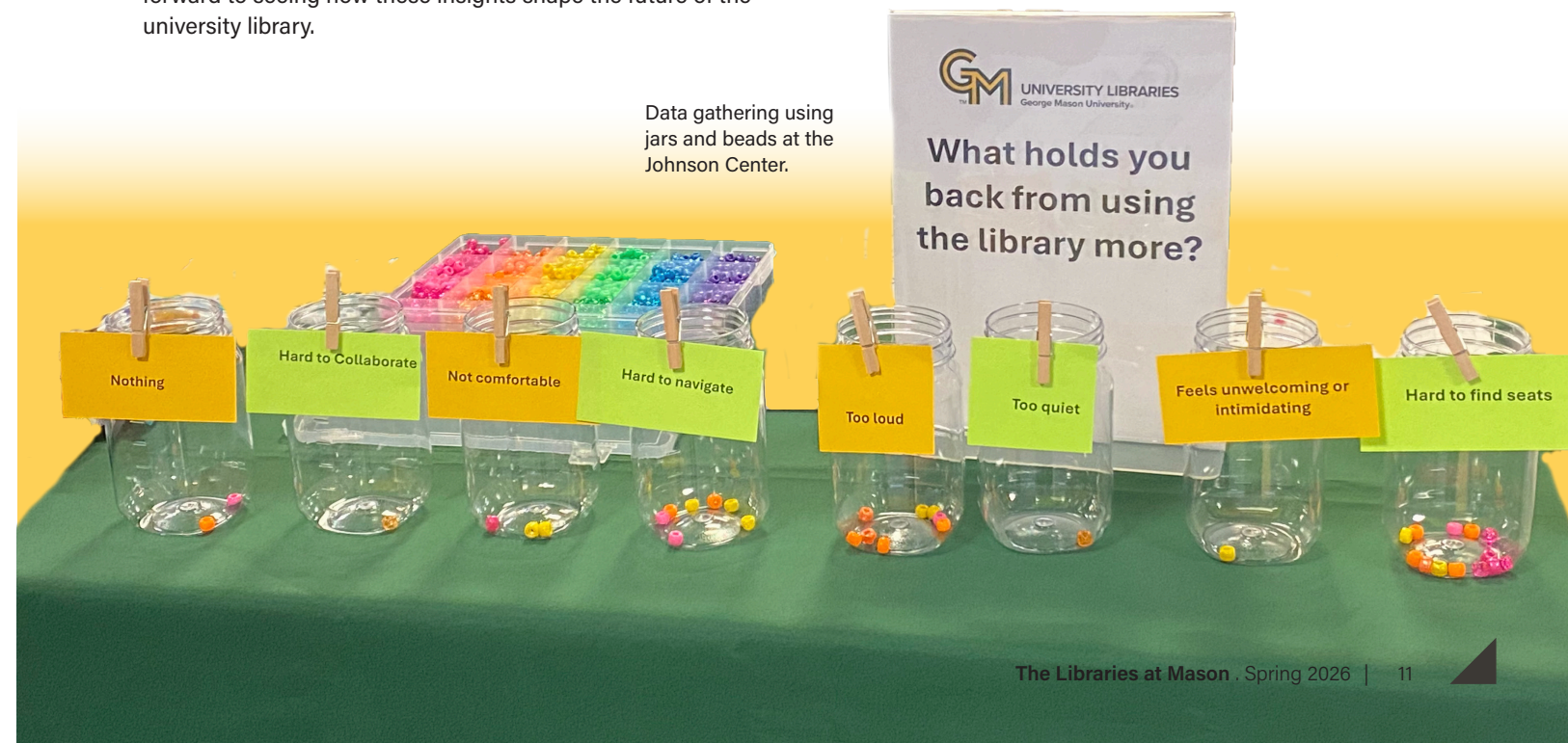
My coursework has played a critical role in preparing me for this work, particularly an Organizational Change and Development course I took in Spring 2025. In that course, I learned about the core phases of organizational change, stakeholder engagement, and consulting skills used to support data-driven transformation. The qualitative analysis process used in the library building visioning project closely reflects what I learned in that course, making it easy to transfer those skills directly into my work with the libraries.

Looking ahead, I am especially excited to continue this work through collaboration with University Business Consulting (UBC) to incorporate faculty perspectives into the building visioning process. I am motivated by the opportunity to integrate student and faculty voices into a more holistic understanding of how library spaces can best support teaching, learning, and community. I look forward to seeing how these insights shape the future of the university library.

What is your major and can you describe what you have worked on for this project?

Jeeho: I study Industrial-Organizational Psychology, which aligns well with the Library Building Visioning project, given its focus on organizational change and development. Over the past semester our team engaged with Student Libraries Advisory Council (SLAC) members to hear their perspectives on library spaces and to solicit feedback on how the library could more effectively communicate its resources and services to the student body. Through open discussion, word cloud visualizations, and surveys, we identified perspectives that were reinforced as well as areas where gaps in understanding remained. These insights informed our next step of intentionally targeting students who do not frequently use the library. After brainstorming as a team and applying principles from my Psychometric Methods course, we developed the following question: *What holds you back from using the library more?* By setting up a booth in the Johnson Center, I was able to listen to students’ concerns and desires regarding the current and future library. Being used to gathering quantitative data through online platforms, this was a special opportunity for me. Meeting the students where they were and hearing their personal experiences allowed me to better appreciate the nuances behind their responses and the lived realities that are often missed in online data collection. ■

Data gathering using jars and beads at the Johnson Center.



STEM Graphic Novels @ Mercer Library

By Alex Baker

The STEM Graphic Novels Collection at Mercer Library began in Fall of 2024 as a collaborative project within the Science and Technology (SciTech) Team. The collection continues to expand, currently consisting of 75 titles. The team developing this collection continues to ensure it reflects the wide array of natural science coursework offered and the identities of those within the George Mason University community. As the university grows and increases its offerings across curricula, so will this collection. These books are prominently displayed near the entrance of Mercer Library, proudly featuring the voices of people across demographics that mirror the cultures and lived experiences of our expansive community.

Intersection of Art and Education

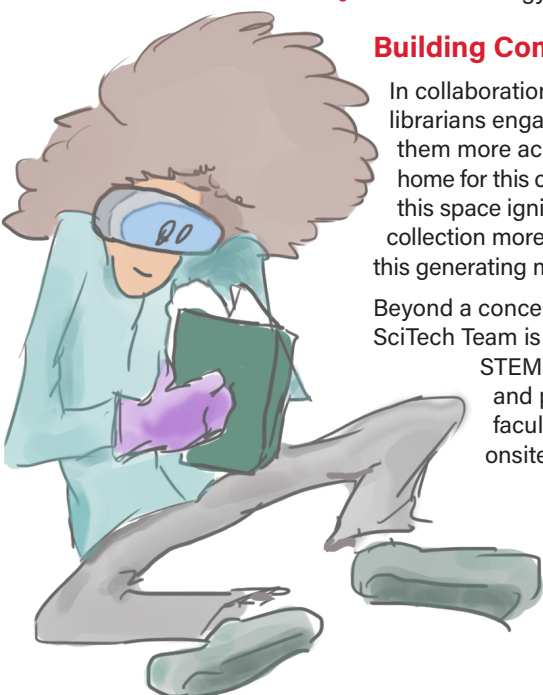
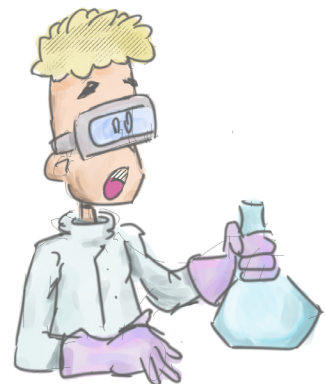
What began as a class project by a member of the SciTech Team is now a major feature of Mercer Library, located on the first floor of Colgan Hall on the SciTech Campus in Manassas, VA. Reading graphic novels is about literacy, enjoying immersive art works woven into narratives within a narrowed scope or topic, and connecting with other readers who find themselves engulfed in the same series and elaborate worlds therein. The multiple series within our STEM collection provide readers with entertaining and digestible ways to consume complex topics such as virology, oncology, immunology, neuroscience, ecology, and much more. Art Spiegelman, author, cartoonist, and advocate for graphic novels, has described this medium as a gateway to literacy.

The University Libraries are committed to addressing the literacy needs of our library users in creative ways, appealing to people across the many disciplines throughout our robust course catalog. Tackling tough subjects with scientific jargon is made easier as the authors and illustrators of these texts provide data visualization and graphic aides with real life and fantastical examples. In the case of forensic science and criminology, the series entitled *Under Your Skin: True Tales of Forensic Science*, authors Gary Jeffrey and Rob Shone, along with illustrators Terry Riley and Nik Spender, provide insights into crime-solving techniques and civil laws paired with realistic dialogue, authentic to true crime science investigations. *Radium Girls*, written and illustrated by Cy, explores the true stories of women factory laborers in 1918s Orange, New Jersey exposed to radioactive materials through failures of industrial hygiene. Readers learn about toxicology and pathology through the real-life effects experienced by actual people as case studies.

Building Community

In collaboration with course instructors to address information literacy and learning outcomes, subject librarians engage in collection development, identifying gaps in information and resources, and make them more accessible. The larger SciTech Team is excited to take next steps in creating a more permanent home for this collection within Mercer Library with comfortable seating and designated shelves. We envision this space igniting greater connections, facilitating future programming and outreach, and making the collection more visible, browsable, and accessible. Given the culture around graphic novels, we anticipate this generating more organic community ties among readers.

Beyond a concerted effort to represent the wide array of academic programs within the university, the SciTech Team is committed to celebrating our all together different community through this collection. The STEM Graphic Novels Collection aspires to capture the shared values, unique lived experiences and perspectives, diverse learning styles, and cultures of our readers. We invite students, staff, faculty, and researchers to checkout items from this collection. You can browse the collection onsite or online using the library's catalog. ■



CURRENT BOOKS AVAILABLE

Discover your next graphic novel

This narrative follows the 1918 outbreak of a mysterious influenza virus that killed millions of people worldwide, making it the deadliest pandemic in history.

The 1918 Flu Pandemic
- Katherine E. Krohn

Nonfiction graphic novel explaining the physiology of the brain and describing theoretical and experimental developments that led to our present understanding.

Neurocomic
- Matteo Farinella, Hana Roš, and Welcome Trust

We use these systems every day, but most of us don't know when and where they were built, or how they even work. What if the way we use them isn't compatible with our world today — or the better future we want to build?

Hidden Systems: Water, Electricity, the Internet, and the Secrets Behind the Systems We Use Every Day
- Dan Nott

A comic-style resource that uses fractal grids, custom-drawn characters, and fun graphics as a visually immersive introduction to the key concepts of beginner coding, learning pedagogy, education, and visual thinking.

Readers eavesdrop on conversations about contemporary science and learn about how scientists uncover the secrets of the universe. Topics in the book range from black holes to the multiverse, to string theory, to food science.

Bit By Bit: A Graphic Introduction to Computer Science
- Ecy Femi King

The Dialogues: Conversations About the Nature of the Universe
- Clifford V. Johnson

Original comics engaging fundamental issues in medical ethics, including patient autonomy, informed consent, unconscious bias, mandated reporting of suspected abuse, confidentiality, medical mistakes, surrogate decision-making, and futility.

Clinical Ethics: A Graphic Novel
- Kimberly R. Myers, Molly L. Osborne, and Charlotte A. Wu

...AND MORE!

Interlibrary Loan: A Service to an Experience

By Michael Hunter

The concept of libraries as primarily physical or transactional spaces has undergone profound change over the past several years. Advances in publicly available search engines, the rise of social media platforms, and evolving perceptions of the value and ownership of information have reshaped how users seek, evaluate, and engage with knowledge. In response, libraries have increasingly shifted from a “just in case” collection model toward a more dynamic “just in time” approach—one that prioritizes access, flexibility, and responsiveness over sheer volume.

As library professionals, our roles have expanded accordingly. We are no longer defined solely by the collections we manage or the services we operate behind the scenes. Instead, we now provide spaces, instruction, and experiences that support discovery, evaluation, and application of information in increasingly complex digital and academic environments. As information creation and retrieval have become more user-driven, librarians have refocused efforts on empowering communities—guiding users through discovery systems, helping them assess credibility, and enabling effective use of tools and resources.

In this context, experience, efficiency, and effectiveness have emerged as guiding principles for library services and resource sharing. Interlibrary loan (ILL), historically framed as a supplemental or transactional function, is now uniquely positioned to support these priorities. When designed intentionally, resource sharing can move from a background service to an integral and seamless part of the user’s research experience.

Rapido at George Mason

It’s About the People—Patrons

In the summer of 2025, George Mason University Libraries implemented a significant transformation in our resource sharing platform, workflows, and organizational approach. The decision followed extensive research, internal discussion, and consultation with colleagues across the academic library community. Our aim was to adopt a system capable of growing with the university while remaining responsive to changing research practices, fiscal realities, and user expectations.

At the center of this decision was the patron experience. George Mason’s academic community is diverse, fast-paced, and increasingly interdisciplinary. We sought a solution that would improve access without increasing complexity, reduce outward-facing friction, and integrate resource sharing into discovery in a meaningful way. We also wanted to automate behind-the-scenes workflows to improve efficiency and capacity, while increasing transparency across operations.

Our solution was the adoption of Rapido, a resource sharing application fully integrated with our integrated library system (Alma), discovery platform (Primo), and academic reserves system (Leganto). Rather than operating as a standalone or siloed service, resource sharing became part of a unified ecosystem—embedded into the same tools patrons already use for searching, requesting, and managing library materials.

This integration fundamentally changed how patrons interact with interlibrary loan. Requests now originate directly from the discovery layer, with minimal distinction between local and external resources. A book request functions like a standard hold. An article request results in a direct download. All activity is managed through a single account dashboard, eliminating the need for patrons to navigate multiple systems or interfaces.

With a single search, users encounter local and shared resources side by side. They receive clear information about delivery timeframes and can submit a request with one click, without encountering separate request forms or authentication barriers. This not only improves usability but also reinforces the perception that the University Libraries provide comprehensive access to the resources needed for coursework, teaching, and research.

Interlibrary loan, in this model, functions as the library’s library—connecting patrons to partner institutions worldwide while keeping the focus on user needs rather than ownership boundaries. By blurring the distinction between locally held and externally sourced materials, we are able to supplement core collections strategically, identify emerging information needs, fill gaps in program areas, and support new research directions without overcollecting.

It’s About the People—Staff

The patron experience was not the only consideration behind our transition to Rapido. Equally important was the impact on staff and the long-term sustainability of interlibrary loan operations.

The Interlibrary Loan department has long been staffed by highly skilled and dedicated professionals. Despite fluctuations in staffing levels and budgetary constraints, the team consistently delivered service that matched—or exceeded—the performance of much larger academic libraries. Achieving those results, however, required constant vigilance, manual mediation, and individual effort.

Rapido presented an opportunity to change that dynamic. By automating routine decision making and request routing, the system reduced the cognitive and operational load associated with high-volume processing. Staff time previously devoted to repetitive tasks could be redirected toward higher value work, including exception handling, relationship management, data analysis, and policy development.

The impact was immediate and measurable. Turnaround times improved, particularly for articles and chapters. The duplication of effort decreased. Analytics became more central to decision making, supporting both operational insight and strategic planning. The system also encouraged deeper engagement with consortial relationships, reinforcing the importance of collaboration and shared infrastructure.

Perhaps most importantly, the transition shifted how staff expertise is applied. Rather than focusing narrowly on transactions, the ILL team now operates in a more strategic role—managing systems, shaping workflows, evaluating data, and strengthening partnerships. This reorientation supports individual professional growth while also positioning the department to respond more effectively to future changes.

By placing people first—both patrons and staff—Rapido has allowed the libraries to align service quality with sustainable labor practices. Technology functions not as a replacement for expertise but as a tool that amplifies it.

Making it Last

Beyond efficiency and experience, modern resource sharing carries significant implications for equity and sustainability. By leveraging collective collections, libraries can reduce unnecessary purchasing while continuing to meet user needs. Smaller institutions gain access to materials that might otherwise be cost-prohibitive, while larger institutions increase the value and visibility of underused resources.

Shared infrastructure also supports responsible stewardship of the scholarly record. As libraries coordinate print retention strategies, licensing agreements, and digital access priorities, integrated resource sharing platforms become essential tools for managing collections collaboratively and intentionally. Resource sharing shifts the focus from ownership to access, enabling libraries to meet immediate needs without compromising long term preservation goals.

Looking ahead, developments in AI-driven request routing, licensing integration, and cross-platform analytics promise to further refine how libraries connect users with materials. As these tools mature, interlibrary loan may continue to fade as a visible concept, functioning instead as a seamless extension of discovery.

At George Mason University Libraries, adopting Rapido was not simply a system migration. It represented a shift in perspective—from service to experience, from transaction to relationship, and from isolated operations to integrated access. In doing so, we reaffirmed a core value of librarianship: that libraries work best when we work together, placing people at the center of every decision we make. ■

Inspiration

into

Action

The University Libraries connect people, ideas, and spaces to inspire learning, research, and innovation. Our events reflect how the George Mason community comes together to celebrate creativity and to support one another. This collection of highlights showcases a glimpse of the engagement, collaboration, and research that have grown from our collections and resources.



Creating a Musical Landscape

Spheres of Engagement: New student compositions, inspired by the Special Collections Research Center, performed by The Spheres Project, a collaborative music ensemble.

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The 18th Century Fairfax-Spencer Family Recipe Book

The Arts and Humanities team celebrates the Fairfax-Spencer Family Recipe Book and launch of the digital collection on the platform, Omeka S.

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The Historical Intelligence Speaker Series presents: Alexander Rose

A conversation moderated by Ken Budd, chair of the Fall for the Book Festival, about Rose's career as an historian and storyteller.

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Inspiring Dialogue and Discovery

Highlights on the Black Lives Next Door Symposium, hosted by the Center for Mason Legacies, and a Constitution Day Forum featuring a distinguished panel of speakers.

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Creating A Musical Landscape

By Lynn E. Eaton

In April 2025, the Main Reading Room in Fenwick Library was filled with music and mixed media composed by students and performed by George Mason faculty and students. This event, the Spheres of Engagement Project performance, is a collaboration between the Reva and Sid Dewberry Family School of Music; Cindy Badilla-Meléndez, Music, Film Studies, and Video Collections Librarian; and the Special Collections Research Center. Dr. June Huang, Director of Strings and Associate Professor of Violin, conceived this project in 2021 to create a way for participants to “share stories and the discovery of shared vision,” stating, “Together, they create a musical landscape.”

The music and media for this event was inspired by a range of images and stories from the holdings in the Special Collections Research Center (SCRC). Students in the program visited the SCRC in the fall and then spent the months of October through March creating, refining, and crafting their string or mixed media interpretations of the materials they saw in their fall visit.

Mieko Palazzo, Research Services Librarian, was faced with the challenge of selecting a limited set of materials from the millions of individual items within hundreds of collections found in Special Collections. But, what a wonderful challenge! This inspired Mieko to look at our holdings in new and different ways. We tell visiting students that historic events are prisms, made up of different ways people experienced and documented them, and that archives are where one finds these prisms of history. The Spheres Project gave Mieko the freedom to select some of the more evocative, emotional, or illustrative publications and objects in our holdings, and to bring them out of the stacks and into musical interpretation.

Over 60 people attended the performance, including School of Music faculty, staff, students, proud family members, and others in the university and local George Mason community. Of note, one of the Spheres student composers, Aidan Mousavi, received a Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) award for their work in that class. The MTNA Southern Division Composer Competition is a prestigious, top-tier event that offers young composers a significant platform for growth, national recognition, and professional feedback. The 2025 event was such a success that the Spheres Project again visited SCRC in Fall 2025 to look at other items and will again have a performance in late Spring 2026.

The transformation of historic items into music

SCRC staff only know part of the ingredients of this magic, and we have briefly noted below the collections (and sometimes individual items) the composers selected for their compositions. The Spheres Project program and keynote presentation more fully describe the work and interpretations. They are both available in the CVPA collection at the George Mason University Libraries' online Digital Collections website.

Lenora Little Scrapbook, a short, heartfelt love-filled valentine from Lenora Little to her boyfriend and future husband, Bill, during World War II served as the inspiration for Fugue in D-“valentine” by George Benskin V. The Little Scrapbook is a wonderful collection of letters and notes between Lenora and Bill, an African American couple, and this collection is a popular item with researchers and classes.

One of the series in this collection is **Viewer Mail** and contains letters by viewers responding to current events, programs, politics and other topics that were covered by C-SPAN. The correspondence in this series ranges from the straightforward to spicy; a few of these notes struck a note and were the inspiration of “To Whom It May Concern” by Stellan Hinz. Selections from the C-SPAN Records, including Viewer Mail, are available online.

Letter from unidentified Confederate soldier to his mother. This letter from 1863 is one of our Civil War

related items and documents the observations and concerns of one person shared with his mother from afar. The composer Sebastian Perry’s “My Dear Ma” portrayed the “dichotomy between mundanity and the horror of war” in his piece. This item is also available online.

Gustav Klemp World War I collection. The SCRC collects materials documenting military conflicts, and the Klemp collection records the experiences of a Prussian soldier in the German army between 1914-1918 with photographic postcards with notes to his family, along with Klemp’s drawings and watercolors of his wartime experiences. Abigail Ostott translated how war ranges from the everyday to the horrific in her piece “Postcards from the Great War.” Selections from this collection have been transcribed and digitized.

Robert Davison original costume and set design scrapbook. Costume and set design are key parts of any theatrical performance, and these pieces are some of the most vivid and expressive items in our robust performing arts holdings. In “The Lobster Stalks Flippo through the Meadow” the composer Zoë Bockman’s music was sparked by an ink drawing titled “Flippo the Erewhon” found in the Davison collection.

Another item in the Davison collection was the origin for Andrew Bells’ piece “A Forest Scene.” The original drawing is unnamed and portrays three women sitting amidst trees in a forest. Although it is not known if this image was meant to inform costume or set designs, Davison’s watercolor image is beautiful as an individual artwork.

African American Women Real Photo postcards. Photographic materials capture and interpret the world around us and are a significant collecting area for SCRC. The photo postcards are in both studio and informal settings. Jay Revis’ mixed media piece “Who Taught You to Hate Yourself” was inspired by a specific image of a young Black woman sitting outside on a chair in a white dress.

“California or Bust” travel scrapbook. Transportation is another collecting area of SCRC, and when that is illustrated in an item documenting travel through photographs and notes, we have a clear winner for the archivists and the researchers! This item documents a group of women friends traveling from New York to California in August 1956, two months after President Eisenhower signed the Federal Highway Act of 1956. These images were the catalyst for Livingston Rampey’s piece “Age: String Quartet.”

Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) records. Another collection inspiring two different compositions, the ATC records document the history of the Appalachian Trail by the organization that helped create and maintain the Trail from its founding to the present. The collection is filled with reports, correspondence, thru-hiker applications, shelter logs, maps, and publications. Photographic materials also make up a substantial part of the collection, as they capture the visual history of the Trail, the originators, leaders, and volunteers.

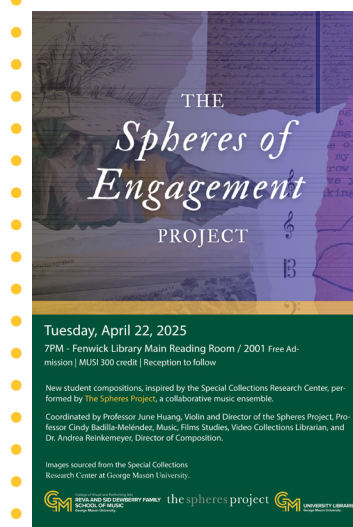
Connor Anderson’s piece, “Scenes from the Blue Ridge,” was inspired by the photographs from the personal photo album of the Trail’s visionary founder, Benton MacKaye, and illustrate how he recorded his time in the mountains he so loved.

Aidan Mousavi’s award-winning piece, “Rolling Tides in a Sea of Trees,” took inspiration from the many photographs evincing the origins of the Trail in the 1920s and the human work required to clear and mark the 2,000 miles of trail from Maine to Georgia. ■



- June Huang, and Suyuan
- Carrasco on violins, Alyssa
- Cabassa on viola, and
- Gerald Fowkes on cello.

- The Spheres of
- Engagement Project
- program from the April
- 2025 event.



The 18th Century Fairfax-Spencer Family Recipe Book

By Lynn E. Eaton

Before there were published books with recipes for food and drink, and when the local hardware store or market was a carriage ride away, if you needed advice on home remedies or how to make a cake for visitors, women and other members of families would create and maintain handwritten books of “recipes” for all these types of materials. The University Libraries are fortunate to have an excellent example of such a book in the 18th Century Fairfax-Spencer Family Recipe Book.

The book was originally digitized in the early 2010s and put online for broader access. However interesting the images, though, researchers and students faced the basic hurdle of reading the contents. Challenging handwriting, faded pencil or ink, and use of out-of-date terms or ingredients all limited people from using the book as a tool to better understand the past and how people lived. We were also missing out on some interesting and sometimes surprising details. Need to know how to prepare roadkill? We got you. Making your own ink? Make sure you get your iron galls!

Unlocking the past

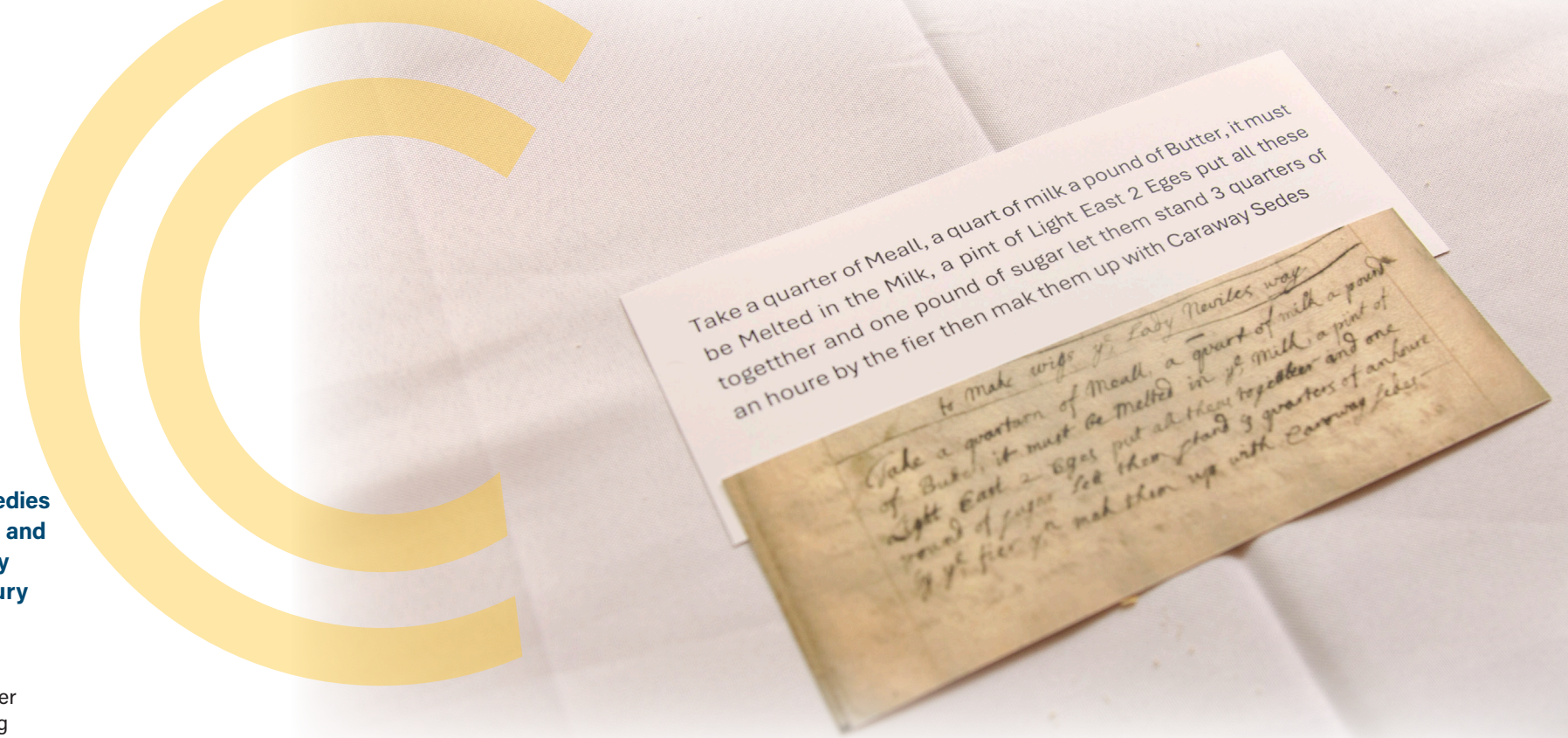
Beginning in 2016, the libraries’ Arts and Humanities (A&H) team brought together a group to investigate digital tools that could bring this recipe book out of the shadows and into researchers’ hands and kitchens across the world. The team chose to use the open-source exhibition platform, Omeka, created here at George Mason in the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media. Students, staff, and faculty spent hundreds of combined hours deciphering and transcribing the contents of the recipe book using the Omeka plugin, Scripto, which enabled crowdsourcing for that work, and members of the A&H team developed an organizing structure for the site and the individual entries. In 2017, a more advanced version of Omeka was released—Omeka S—and the team decided to migrate to the new platform for its greater versatility. There were technical challenges migrating the transcription work: Scripto was not supported by Omeka S, and the original data required significant cleanup with assistance from faculty and a graduate research assistant in the Data and Digital Scholarship Services team.

This digital collection, with images, descriptions, contextual information, and additional content, is an illustrative example of how many people are often needed to come together to make a resource usable and useful.

Great 18th Century British Baking Challenge

The planners chose from over 250 possibilities and selected three recipes for participants to make following the directions in the Recipe Book and then bring to the Baking Challenge for people to taste test and vote for their favorite dish. The choices were Gingerbread, Lemon Biscuit, and “Wigs the Lady Neviles way.” Although gingerbread seemed like the simplest choice, all bakers know that part of the joy and pain of baking is the balance of dry and wet ingredients, and the resulting chemical reactions and interplay in the batter.

Over forty people came to the library’s Main Reading Room the afternoon of May 21, 2025, to taste the offerings of multiple contestants, and to learn more about the cookbook and the work behind the online digital humanities project. The library staff hosted an interactive, engaging event. Multiple contestants placed their finished products on a table where the crowd stopped by for a taste test and voted for their favorites. Based on the feedback from the audience, a winner was chosen for each of the recipes: To Make



Take a quarter of Meall, a quart of milk a pound of Butter, it must be Melted in the Milk, a pint of Light East 2 Egges put all these together and one pound of sugar let them stand 3 quarters of an hour by the fier then mak them up with Caraway Sedes

To Make wigs the Lady Neviles way
Take a quart of Meall, a quart of milk a pound of Butter, it must be Melted in the Milk, a pint of Light East 2 Egges put all these together and one pound of sugar let them stand 3 quarters of an hour by the fier then mak them up with Caraway Sedes

Wigs the Lady Neviles Way: Isabelle Schwartz, Lemon Biscuits: Meg Meiman, and Gingerbread: Julianne Muel-ler. For those of you wondering, in the 18th century English baking world a “wig” was the name for buns or small cakes. A very special Rogue Baker prize went to Caesar Liendo and his guest for a fantastic version of Elizabeth Fairfax-Spencer’s cheesecake recipe. Each recipe had its own challenges of interpreting ingredients and direc-tions. The work of the transcribers made the recipes somewhat easier to translate for the bakers, but it was still an adventure finding the appropriate temperature for a “quick oven”, or for what to set one’s oven temperature to equal a specific time for the recipe to “stand...by the fire!”

Everyone is welcome to give their best attempt at home with any of the recipes. Please keep your eyes open for the next iteration of the 18th Century Great British Baking Challenge in the works for November 2026. ■

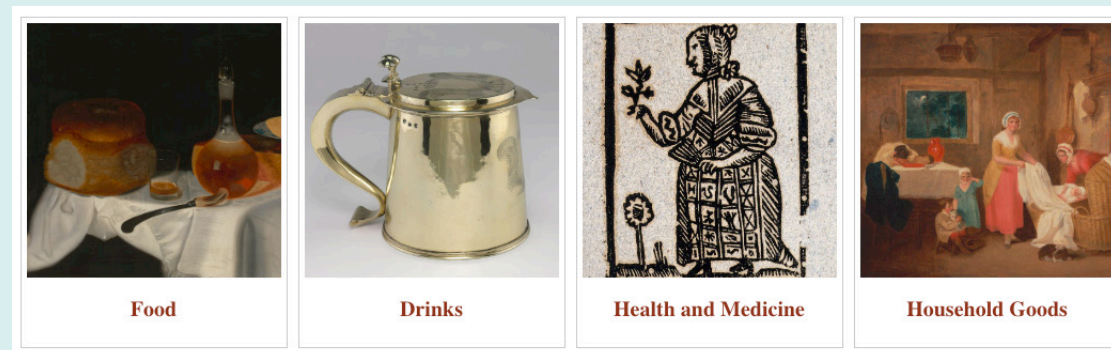
A recipe “To Make Wigs the Lady Neviles Way” from the original manuscript.



Baked goods submitted to the Baking Challenge.

Fairfax-Spencer Family Recipe Book

This digital project site provides a full subject index and annotations of each entry in the manuscript, ranging from food recipes to household medicine and management. Browse the categories below or explore the book by subject.



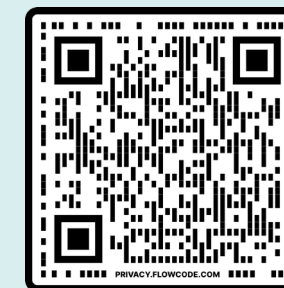
Food

Drinks

Health and Medicine

Household Goods

The entire project was completed in 2025, and is located here:



Historical Intelligence Speaker Series Welcomes Alexander Rose

By Tammy Rogers

On March 4, 2026, George Mason University Libraries welcomed acclaimed historian and author Alexander Rose for an engaging evening as part of the Historical Intelligence Speaker Series. Hosted by the University Libraries' Special Collections Research Center, the program drew faculty, students, researchers, and members of the wider community with an interest in intelligence history and archival research.

In conversation with moderator Ken Budd, chair of the Fall for the Book Festival, Rose reflected on his career as a historian and storyteller, drawing on his acclaimed works, including *Washington's Spies*, to explore the practice of espionage across time and the essential role archives play in uncovering hidden histories. He highlighted how intelligence records, personal correspondence, and government documents preserved in collections such as the Hayden B. Peake Intelligence Collection allow historians to reconstruct the human dimensions of intelligence work and place it within a broader global and cultural context.

The discussion was followed by a lively audience question-and-answer session. Attendees asked about Rose's research methods, the challenges of interpreting classified or fragmentary sources, and the balance between narrative storytelling and scholarly rigor. Rose also addressed questions about emerging directions in intelligence history and offered advice to students and early-career researchers interested in working with archival collections.

The evening concluded with a book signing, where guests had the opportunity to meet Rose personally, continue the conversation, and have copies of his books signed. The informal exchange underscored the event's goal of connecting scholarships with public engagement.

Overall, the program highlighted the depth and global significance of the Hayden B. Peake Intelligence Collection and underscored George Mason University Libraries' commitment to supporting scholarship, fostering dialogue, and providing access to world-class special collections through programs that bring history to life. ■



Ken Budd and Alexander Rose during an audience Q&A.



Features from the Hayden B. Peake Intelligence Collection showcased by the Special Collections Research Center.

Inspiring Dialogue and Discovery

Black Lives Next Door Symposium: Students Illuminate Hidden Histories

The 2026 Black Lives Next Door Symposium, hosted by the Center for Mason Legacies (CML) and the Department of African and African American Studies, filled Fenwick Library's Main Reading Room on February 10, 2026 with an energy that blended scholarship, community storytelling, and an urgency to rethink how history is preserved and shared. Graduate and undergraduate researchers presented deeply local projects that challenged long held narratives about Northern Virginia's past. Samantha Chevalier Chung opened with *"Black Lives and Horse Culture,"* uncovering the overlooked contributions of Black horse breeders, groomers, and riders in Middleburg and Fairfax. Jenaveve Quigley followed with a digital restoration of the Shiloh Baptist community's history, revealing how digitization can repair archival gaps. Jayme Kurland's *"A County of Contrasts"* traced power, development, and segregation in suburbanizing Fairfax, while Shemika Curvey explored how Black families and congregations forged freedom through kinship and spiritual practice. Supported by Coherent Digital and TheirStory, the symposium set the stage for a lively BLND Planning Luncheon focused on community-engaged scholarship.



By Tammy Rogers

Crafting a New Era of Community-Powered History

The luncheon that followed evolved into a forward looking planning session emphasizing partnerships built on reciprocity rather than extractive research. Participants highlighted opportunities with local archives, genealogists, and churches, recognized as trusted spaces for healing and storytelling. Ideas surfaced for mobile "CML on the Road" programs, artifact collection days, summer camps, and tailored community events with more inclusive outreach. Participants highlighted opportunities with local archives, genealogists, and especially churches. Looking ahead, attendees outlined concrete next steps: building a partner contact list, developing a CML Community Advisory Board, and identifying opportunities to participate in key regional celebrations, such as Juneteenth and Emancipation Day. The team also identified the need to map potential venues, catalog CML talks and research projects, and pursue new fundraising strategies to support expanding community-based historical work.

Shemika Curvey presenting her research at the BLND Symposium.

Constitution Day Forum: Engaging Minds in Civic Dialogue

On September 17, 2025, nearly 200 guests registered to attend the libraries' Constitution Day Forum, featuring a distinguished panel of constitutional scholars: Attorney Jonathan Massey, Professor Jennifer Victor, and Distinguished University Professor Rosemarie Zagari. Moderated by Lorena Jordan, Policy and Government Librarian, and George Oberle, History Librarian and Director of the Center for Mason Legacies, the discussion focused on the evolving nature of executive power in the United States. Audience members contributed to a lively Q&A session, making the event a powerful example of George Mason's commitment to civic education and public discourse. ■

Left to Right: George Oberle, Professor Rosemarie Zagari, Associate Professor Jennifer N. Victor, Jonathan S. Massey, and Lorena Jordan.



Inspired by the Libraries

By Viviana Calderon

In 2025, the University Libraries staffed...

76 Students

11 Non-Student Wage Employees

18 Graduate Assistants

Many have since graduated, while others have grown into new roles at the library. One of George Mason University's core values is **OUR STUDENTS COME FIRST** "Our top priority is to provide students with a transformational learning experience that helps them grow as individuals, scholars, and professionals." The libraries strive to be a part of our community growth, development, and life beyond graduating. It is important to the University Libraries to reflect on the impact that student workers had during their time here and what inspired them to be where they are now. I met with **Opal Ring**, non-student wage employee, **Franchesca Montequin**, student worker, and **Maris Tiller**, graduate research assistant, to talk about their journey working at the library and what they've found to be the most impactful.

"Hearings before the Committee on Internal Security" featured in the Hayden B. Peake Intelligence Collection.



Can you talk about what you do at the library?

- Opal:** On paper, I'm a cataloger, but primarily, I manage the Hayden B. Peake Intelligence Collection, a 10,000-volume gift collection revolving around the Intelligence Community, which includes much more than cataloging. I'm responsible for shifting, shelving, evaluating, and preserving the collection, meaning most of my work is hands-on with the books themselves. I've been working almost exclusively on the Peake collection for a little over a year now, meaning I'm intimately familiar with this library-within-a-library. I also serve on a few committees, such as the Access, Belonging, and Community Council, and I give presentations about the collection, and other topics, when the opportunity arises.
- Maris:** As a GRA in the Special Collections Research Center, my primary job consists of helping with research requests. I pull SCRC materials for researchers and classes, to either be scanned or looked at by appointment in the reading room. I am also responsible for watching over researchers as they handle our materials to make sure nothing gets damaged.
- Franchesca:** The overall goal of the Communications and Marketing department is to highlight library resources and strengthen and engage the University Libraries community. My job is to assist the Communications & Marketing Coordinator, Viviana Calderon, to reach these goals. More specifically, I help with the creation of social media content, edit and proofread materials before release, assist with the media coverage at events, brainstorm new ways to engage the community.



"The first time stepping into a university library is a daunting yet enticing experience, with seemingly endless towers of information yet to be grasped, much of it niche and unique, though authoritative and well-researched."

—Opal Ring

How has working in or using the library influenced your academic path, career goals, or how you see your future?

Opal: Most directly, I've been given the opportunity to pursue a master's degree in philosophy for free through the university employee waiver program, but I've found interesting niches within the library to pursue as well. I have been inspired by Amy Sullivan, SCRC's Preservation Officer, to jump into the world of preservation and restoration, which has led me to volunteer at the museum in the town of Occoquan, working to preserve their artifacts, primarily photos and manuscripts. Working closely with SCRC on the Peake collection has given me the wonderful opportunity to work with rare and remarkable books every day, which is not something that I want to give up any time soon.

Maris: I have changed my academic and career path significantly since starting to work in the SCRC. I came into my M.F.A. program with the idea of teaching Creative Writing. This was still my goal when I started working as a student assistant in Special Collections, but I came to like the work I was doing so much that I began to reconsider my path. I realized my interests aligned more with libraries, archives, and research than they did with teaching. As of this semester, I have started an online MLIS program through San Jose State University in the hopes of working in libraries when I graduate.

Franchesca: My experience working within the University Libraries has helped me reframe my professional goals to best make use of my skillset and experience I've gained at George Mason. I have always been interested in communications and digital marketing, but my work has encouraged me to take the next step and declare a marketing minor.

“I feel more connected to the George Mason community at large because I get to work with people outside of my specific graduate program. All kinds of people – students, faculty, and Fairfax community members – come here to access materials from our archives.” **—Maris Tiller**



If you were telling a new student why working at the library can be *inspiring*, what would you say?

Opal: Chiefly, it's the community aspect that makes working at Fenwick Library different than any other department across campus. Sure, you can skate by just doing what's asked of you, but if you are willing to put in that extra 15-20%, it won't go unnoticed. Someone always needs extra hands, another is willing to answer.

Maris: Working at the library can really connect you with other people. The people you are working with, both co-workers and patrons, often have specific and fascinating information that can expand your worldview and scope of interests. Simply by assisting other people with their research, you can find something that interests you.

Franchesca: Working as a student worker has given me the opportunity to grow, learn, and help make an impact. It's so rewarding to see all the hard work happening behind the scenes have a direct impact on someone's George Mason journey, even if it's just in small ways.

Something I will take with me from my time at the libraries is that learning never stops. There is always something new to learn and always room for improvement. Whether you are a student, faculty, or staff—there is a community of people at the University Libraries who are here to support you and your success. It is an experience that I would definitely recommend if you get the opportunity!

“My experience at the libraries has helped me gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the importance of free access to information and resources. The libraries offer tools and opportunities to grow and empower communities.” **—Franchesca Montequin**



How Training Shapes Public History Beyond George Mason University

By Tammy Rogers

When historians talk about “where history happens,” they often mean national archives, major cities, or well documented political centers. But for Dr. Tony Guidone, Assistant Professor of History at Radford University and a 2023 PhD graduate of George Mason University, history is most powerful when it begins close to home. Guidone’s path, from doctoral student to faculty member, reflects the enduring impact of the Center for Mason Legacies (CML). The methods he learned at George Mason, rooted in collaboration, archival curiosity, and local engagement, continue to shape how he teaches, researches, and builds historical projects today.

Making History Accessible

Guidone’s interest in public history stems from a simple but expansive idea: history should be accessible to people who are not historians. “I really like the idea of history interacting with people who aren’t history majors or scholars,” he explains. “Making history interesting, accessible, and relevant to everyday life is one of the most powerful parts of public and digital history.” While research increasingly unfolds online, Guidone emphasizes that meaningful history is also embedded in neighborhoods, buildings, and overlooked records, often hiding in plain sight. That philosophy aligns closely with CML’s mission to uncover local and hidden histories and bring them to broader audiences.

Global History, Local Focus

Guidone’s dissertation, “The Empire City: A Global History of Salem, Massachusetts, 1783–1820,” examined international trade networks in the early United States. Though global in scope, the project was grounded in a place-based study of a single city. “Even when you’re looking at global connections, you’re still telling a story that’s rooted in a specific place,” he notes. “That emphasis on local, place-based history was something CML really reinforced.”

That local focus carried over into his research on the Mason family. Through work with account books, court records, and archival materials dating back to the seventeenth century, Guidone found intersections between his interests in trade and the histories preserved at George Mason. One such connection emerged through John Mason, whose business partnership with a merchant in France opened new avenues for understanding transatlantic commerce, and was strengthened when George Mason University Libraries acquired related documents from overseas.

Letting the Archives Lead

One of the most formative aspects of Guidone’s time with CML was the intellectual freedom he was given. “George Oberle, Director, Center for Mason Legacies, really turned me loose in the archives,” he recalls. “We started with Mason family court records, thinking about access and digitization. But in doing that, we kept uncovering stories that hadn’t received the attention they deserved.”

“Making history interesting, accessible, and relevant to everyday life is one of the most powerful parts of public and digital history.”

—Tony Guidone

That exploratory, student driven approach led to discoveries that expanded well beyond the original scope of Mason centered research. As the work unfolded, CML increasingly turned its attention to population change, African American history, and the shifting demographics of Northern Virginia, particularly in the years surrounding the Civil War and the founding of George Mason University.

Small archival fragments sparked deeper investigations. A single piece of correspondence led to research on Andy Smith, a little-known historical figure who once lived on campus. Another document pointed toward an African American church whose story was entwined with desegregation, community displacement, and George Mason’s physical expansion. What began as index cards and handwritten notes became compelling narratives about the region’s past. “These were stories that very easily could have been forgotten,” Guidone says. “But they mattered, and CML created the space to pursue them.”

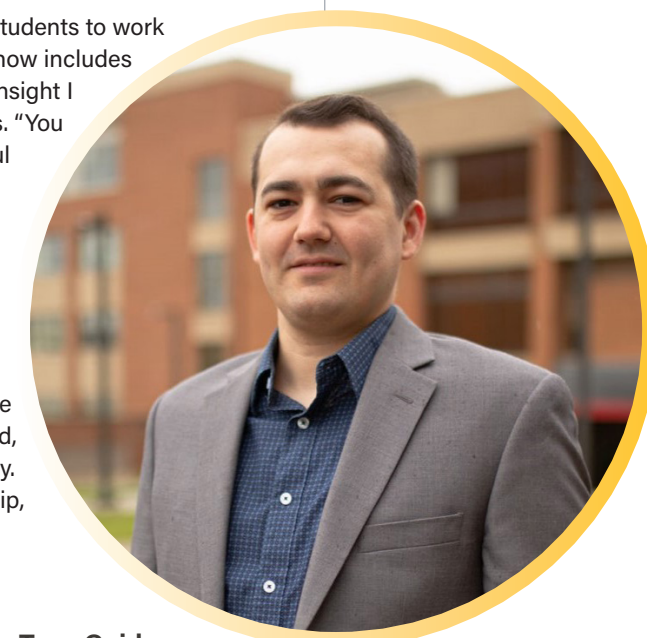
Carrying the Model Forward

Today, Guidone applies those same principles at Radford University through his work with the Center for Archives and Digital History. There, he mentors students in identifying, preserving, and digitizing local histories, often in partnership with community organizations. One project in particular echoes the CML model almost exactly. Seeking a local partner, Guidone connected with the Wythe County Historical Society and gained access to a set of nineteenth century medical ledgers. The volumes, dating from the 1810s to the 1830s, documented medical encounters for enslaved individuals, records that had never been digitized or systematically studied.

The historical society’s willingness to collaborate and lend materials allowed students to work directly with the ledgers. Together, they are building a growing database that now includes more than 500 recorded instances of medical care for enslaved people. “The insight I took from CML is that there’s history everywhere around us,” Guidone explains. “You don’t need a massive archive in a major city. What you need is curiosity, careful methods, and a willing local partner.”

An Enduring Impact

For Guidone, CML provided more than research experience; it offered a model for student engaged scholarship. “I really learned what student faculty collaboration can look like,” he says. “It showed me how to integrate students into meaningful projects, build community partnerships, and tell stories that are often overlooked but deeply important.” That model continues to ripple outward, in classrooms, archives, and communities far beyond George Mason University. Guidone’s work demonstrates how investments in student research, mentorship, and archival access create lasting impacts long after graduation. ■



Tony Guidone

CML's Continuing Influence

Alumna Profiles

By Mandy Katz

While Dr. Guidone's story shows how CML's training travels outward through faculty careers and new institutional partnerships, the Center's influence is just as evident in the work of alumni building public history from different professional angles. The following profiles of Stephanie Martinez and Anne Dobberteen reflect shared CML commitments to accessibility, digital fluency, and community-centered research beyond academia. Where Guidone advances the model through teaching and archives, Martinez applies it to audience-focused interpretation, and Dobberteen to curatorial and scholarly work. Together, they show how CML prepares historians to shape how history is presented, preserved, and understood by the public.

Anne Dobberteen

Historian Anne Dobberteen was one of the Center for Mason Legacies' earliest researchers, so it seems fitting that her work shaping CML in turn is helping her shape a career in public history. She started as a graduate research assistant on the first Mason Family Account Book digitization project and later helped create the ongoing Black Lives Next Door project, which played a formative role in CML's creation.

CML's grounding in digital scholarship enhanced her functioning "historian's toolkit" and, also important since completing her doctorate last year, her resume. Through studying local Black communities, she honed her skills in oral history, digital tools, and novel archival methods, all of which informed the visual and material culture approach of her dissertation on women's contributions to local air defenses in World War II. That paper will soon be a book (working title: *Eyes Aloft! The Aircraft Warning Service, Visual Culture, and the Women Who Served*), which Dobberteen is working on with support from a Women's Military History fellowship provided by the Smithsonian Institution.

Dobberteen also undertook museum work during her graduate studies, curating an exhibit on images of early D.C. for the Albert H. Small Washingtoniana Collection at George Washington University's museum and conducting an oral history project for D.C.'s Heurich House Museum. As she pursues a curatorial career, she calls digital humanities a "calling card" for alums of George Mason, explaining, "because George Mason is synonymous with digital history, having some kind of digital history project your name is attached to is almost expected in the job market." Along with disciplinary training and experience with web tools like Omeka, CML gave her the chance to publish prolifically and see her work jump from pixels to print when three sections of her online exhibit were reproduced in the 2024 book, *Black Communities of Fairfax: A History*, by Black author Jenee Lindner, whose Fairfax ancestors included white slaveholders.

Beyond any individual resume, Dobberteen noted that CML's commitment to archival and digital skills to preserve community stories ensures crucial content remains with us. "As someone who's done local history," she reflected, "having these things up in accessible ways, whether on the website or [as in Lindner's book] in the local library means a future researcher like me, trying to understand this period of local history, will have this resource."

Anne Dobberteen



Stephanie Martinez

Stephanie Martinez considers herself a professional "eavesdropper." At least, that's how she summarizes her task as Evaluation Specialist at George Washington's Mount Vernon. Set to open in July, "George Washington: A Revolutionary Life" will help mark the site's America250 commemoration. Martinez's job is to invite children and families for "sneak peeks" and then conduct follow-up questionnaires and conversations to assess what kind of intergenerational reactions it prompts. Experienced in data research and public history, she relishes the role of gathering and analyzing the responses of test audiences to a major new exhibit as it enters the final development stages.

Martinez's work at Mount Vernon advances her goal of a career in "helping public history institutions know their audiences better." Her resume abounds with visitor experience roles, as well as teaching and other public-facing positions, so Martinez is in the habit of viewing museum content not so much from the production or curatorial side as from the outside in. "There can be exceptional scholarship behind exhibit content and programs," she reflects, "but, if institutions don't know how and what visitors are walking away with, how do we know if it's effective?"

Martinez encountered the Center for Mason Legacies in the latter part of her master's studies at George Mason, in the spring of 2023, while in the singular Black Lives Next Door class taught by CML co-founders Wendi Manuel-Scott and George Oberle. Term projects for the course, which taught the use of archival, digital and GPS mapping methods to uncover local and community history, consisted of online exhibits narrating elements of Black experience in Northern Virginia. For hers, Martinez chose to study education, investigating the resilience of Occoquan's African American community in fostering quality schools in the early twentieth century even as they were isolated to their town's literal margins.

From this experience, Martinez was offered a position with CML, as professors sought her skills as a digital project manager. CML had created a model digital framework for classifying its digital archive, but the data had grown faster than it could be catalogued, reaching more than 4,000 research and exhibit items relating to Northern Virginia history. These were uploaded in batches over years by different scholars for varied projects, so in place of archival consistency, they amounted to the digital equivalent of over-stuffed bankers boxes. Martinez applied her familiarity with CML's methodology, materials and digital platforms to massaging large chunks of this archive into tidy metadata formats on the Omeka-S web platform, rendering them more searchable and accessible.

Analyzing the hundreds of Mount Vernon exit surveys, as different as it might seem from Martinez's research into narratives of past centuries, still draws on her CML experience. "Using contemporary data can be far easier," she reflects, because unlike the work of a historian, her Mount Vernon "evidence" literally comes to her project. "It's the people there, right?" she asks. "And yet I think there's overlap in that you're taking these data points, these sources, and deriving a narrative from them. You're drawing conclusions based on evidence, and you have craft a compelling narrative."

The through-line of her public history roles began on campus, she says: "That little seed had been planted and was sprouting through the CML work, of this passion for investigation into education...having done all that work in CML on local history, and being able to see trends across local history, and then having an opportunity with the Maryland research to bring what I had learned from my study of Occoquan." That gave her a "steppingstone over to Mount Vernon" and the chance to help ensure that interpretations around America250, and public history efforts more generally, land with impact. ■



Stephanie Martinez

Teaching Honors Students to Research and Write About Their University's History

By Bob Vay and Mieko Palazzo



Bob and Mieko doing a class presentation in Spring 2025.

For graduate students in the humanities, archival research is often a rite of passage into the work of historical discovery. For undergraduates, that kind of immersive research experience is far less common. In the spring and fall 2025, a cohort of 30 George Mason University honors students stepped into that world through Honors 360: Mason History in the Archives, a course that placed archival research at the center of the class.

George Mason History in SCRC

Co-taught by Mieko Palazzo, Research Services Librarian, and Bob Vay, University Archivist, alongside Maoria Kirker, Lead, Teaching and Learning, the course challenged students to uncover untold stories from George Mason's history using materials housed in the Special Collections Research Center (SCRC). From the first day of

class, students were positioned not just as learners, but as researchers and storytellers. Rather than relying on textbooks or secondary sources, students worked hands-on with original records, ultimately creating digital humanities projects on the Omeka platform.

Before students could begin digging into the archival records, they first had to learn how archives work and what an archive is and what it is not. Over the course of 10-12 visits each semester, students met in the SCRC seminar room for instruction led by archival staff. The early sessions focused on foundational archival concepts: archival terminology, how archives are responsibly managed, and how to request, access, and use records.

The Making of an Archivist

Students were introduced to the types of records preserved in George Mason's University archives, from administrative documents, photographs, and official university reports to student newspapers, yearbooks, and ephemera that captured student life across decades. They also learned about proper handling techniques, such as using one folder and box at a time, and wearing gloves while handling loose photographs, which helped them gain an appreciation for the work that goes into making archival collections accessible and how important it is to care for records.

Just as importantly, students were taught how to find what they were looking for. SCRC staff helped them understand what a finding aid is and how it functions as a guide to a collection. As well as teaching them how to use ArchivesSpace, a web-based information management system which helps SCRC manage, describe and provide access to its holdings. They also learned to navigate SCRC's online resources, including materials on the digital asset management system LUNA to access digitized records both on-site and remotely.

For many students, this was their first exposure to primary sources of historical research. Working in small teams, students were tasked with identifying an aspect of George Mason's history that interested them. Topics included: university greenhouses and sustainability efforts, the impact on university branding by the Men's Basketball Team's 2006 Final Four run, on-campus protests, and LGBTQ+ history at George Mason.



Class visiting the WWII exhibit.

Once each group selected a topic, they began reviewing collections and boxes of interest, evaluating materials for relevance, scope, and storytelling potential. Some of the teams worked with materials that were already digitized, while also spending class sessions going through physical records. During this process, students would sometimes discover that they would have to rethink their original ideas, based on the resources they found.

In a couple of cases, students worked with unprocessed materials - collections that had not yet been fully arranged or described. Their research needs helped guide access decisions and ultimately informed future processing priorities, which included the processing of the Women and Gender Studies Center records.

Experiencing Archives

Over the course of the semester, students developed their projects, starting with project pitches and detailed plans, for which they received consultation from archivists. Students then translated their research into narratives through mini presentations, refining the content and structure. The course concluded with a formal presentation and the creation of a polished digital project.

Throughout the process, students also worked alongside Alyssa Fahringer, Digital Humanities Librarian, who provided instruction on creating, describing, and uploading records in Omeka.

This course went beyond research mechanics to immerse students in the broader professional world of archives. Students toured the SCRC, including the closed stacks, gaining behind-the-scenes insight into how collections are stored, preserved, and made accessible. They learned that archives are not neutral spaces, but collections shaped by human decisions—what to save, how to describe it, and how to make it accessible.

As part of the class, students also attended SCRC special events, including exhibit openings. These experiences introduced them to exhibit curation from an archival perspective and highlighted how archives communicate stories to the public. Seeing their research in conversation with curated exhibits helped students understand archives not just as repositories but as active sites of interpretation and engagement.

By the end of the semester, students got to experience archives as archival workers do, as dynamic environments shaped by collaboration, passion, and ongoing discovery.

The course served to demystify archival research, giving students practical skills they can carry into future academic work, graduate study, or careers in libraries, museums, public history, and beyond. Just as importantly, it gave them confidence: confidence to ask questions of primary sources, to navigate the collection databases, and to contribute original knowledge to the historical record. ■

Inspiration Across Time, Nature, and the Body

Exhibitions featured in 2025

By Liz Louise Johnson



Jeffrey Kenney, *Weathered Sunflowers* (2020), from the *Cross-Pollination* exhibit.

Fenwick Gallery's two-walled space functions like an open book, with each installation acting as a different chapter authored by faculty and student collaborations, emerging artists, and partnerships with local and national institutions. Our exhibitions invite viewers to pause, reflect, and engage with ideas that span cultures, disciplines, and lived experiences, offering a form of visual and artistic literacy.

This year's program opened with *Loving Krishna: Four Centuries of Indian Paintings* and closed with *The Mirage of Ancient Egypt*, creating bookends rooted in global histories and student-led scholarship. Between these exhibitions, the gallery presented *Cross-Pollination*, a faculty exhibition held in conjunction with the opening of Fenwick Library's Seed Library, *Neither/Nor*, a collaborative exhibition by MFA students examining the embodiment of self, and *How We See What They Saw: A Reading Room of Photobooks by Women*, an exhibit including over 80 photobooks and monographs spanning nearly two centuries. Across the year, inspiration was drawn from around the world, from the natural environment that sustains us, and from deeply personal experiences of identity and transformation.

Installation view of a selection of 10 x 10 Photobooks, *How We See What They Saw: A Reading Room of Photobooks by Women*.



"Photobook history needs to be unwritten..."

Russel Lederman and Olga Yatskevitch



Loving Krishna, installation view.

Loving Krishna: Four Centuries of Indian Paintings (November 22, 2024–February 15, 2025)

Loving Krishna was curated by students in the art history seminar, "Curating an Exhibition." Under the guidance of Robert DeCaroli, Professor, Art History, the class worked collaboratively to research, interpret, and present devotional imagery centered on the Hindu god Krishna. Through a partnership with the Smithsonian National Museum of Asian Art and Dr. Debra Diamond, curator, South and Southeast Asian Art, students selected to-scale reproductions of paintings from the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries, drawn from the Smithsonian's collection.

Krishna was easily recognized throughout the exhibition by his blue complexion and playful, often mischievous presence. The selected paintings explored his many relationships as a lover, friend, child, and divine protector, particularly his intimate bond with Radha, his most devoted companion. These scenes reflect the tradition of bhakti devotionalism, which emphasizes personal, reciprocal relationships between devotees and the divine. By foregrounding these intimate narratives, the exhibition offered visitors an accessible entry point into complex religious and cultural histories.

As a student-curated exhibition, *Loving Krishna* demonstrated how Fenwick Gallery inspires learning by placing students at the center of scholarly production. Visitors encountered global art history through the lens of emerging scholars, while students gained hands-on experience working with museum collections, academic research, and public presentation.

Visitors viewing *Krishna Protects Gopis from the Rain and Worship of Shri Nathi*.





Cross-Pollination (March 17–May 16, 2025)

In celebration of the opening of Fenwick Library's Seed Library, *Cross-Pollination* explored the relationship between the earth's natural systems and the creative process, drawing on both the literal and metaphorical meanings of cross-pollination.

Left: Wanda Raimundi-Ortiz, *At the Foot of a 400 Year-Old Ceiba Tree #3*, right: *Treasures That Were My Birthright*.

- Faculty and staff artists were invited to contribute to work around themes of ecology, growth, decay, and renewal. Wanda Raimundi-Ortiz, Professor, School of Art drew inspiration from her Puerto Rican heritage and presented large-scale pastel drawings of a 400-year-old Ceiba tree at her family home.
- Raimundi-Ortiz writes, "[I was] inspired by photos from my most recent trip to the mountains of Puerto Rico. Through embodied knowledge, I am compelled to learn the curves and lines of the island through my fingers in my large-scale drawings to better understand the land of my parents." Elizabeth Hall, Adjunct Professor, School of Art similarly explored the relationship between nature and the body, presenting a series of twelve images that connect bodily systems with plants traditionally associated with healing. Together, the artists in *Cross-Pollination* foregrounded nature not as a distant subject, but as a lived, relational force that sustains both creative practice and collective responsibility.
- The exhibition's connection to the Seed Library reinforced the idea that both art and libraries function as spaces of exchange. Just as seeds carry the potential for future growth, these artworks encouraged viewers to consider their own role within ecological and cultural systems.



Stephanie Benassi, *Scenes from a Hive*.



Neither/Nor (July 3–September 5, 2025)

Neither/Nor was a collaborative exhibition by CVPA graduate students Tracy Reynolds, MFA candidate, and Liz Louise Johnson, MFA, 2025, and examined the gendered body as a nonconforming, transitional, and often unruly space. Working with handmade paper and photography, the artists explored how bodies are perceived, shaped, disciplined, and transformed by social norms and expectations.

For Johnson's photographic series *Ripe and Rot*, the artist worked with decaying fruit as a collaborator, balanced against her body until it bruised, collapsed, and broke apart. This work navigated themes of fertility, time, and bodily entropy, and embraced impermanence rather than seeking a fixed meaning. Reynolds's ongoing sculptural work, *Raise*, offered another perspective, centered on trans and nonconforming bodies. Constructed through an intensive process of beating fiber into pulp and embedding hair and latex into still-wet paper, the work exists in tension between containment and eruption, beauty and the grotesque.

Neither/Nor reflected Fenwick Gallery's commitment to supporting emerging artists as they test ideas, materials, and conceptual boundaries. With courage and vulnerability, these artists invited viewers to engage with questions of transformation and the complexities of embodiment.

Tracy Reynolds, *Raise*, detail.

Liz Louise Johnson, *Ripe and Rot*.





How We See What They Saw: A Reading Room of Photobooks by Women

(September 15–November 21, 2025)

How We See What They Saw (HWSWTS) reframed photographic history by centering women and nonbinary photographers whose contributions have historically been undervalued or omitted from the canon. Designed as a hands-on reading room, the exhibition invited visitors to engage

- with more than 80 photobooks and monographs spanning nearly two centuries. The exhibition traced its roots to Anna Atkins's *Cyanotypes of British Algae* (1843), the first photographically illustrated book, while extending the conversation to contemporary photobook practices. Developed in collaboration with 10x10 Photobooks and its authors and curators Russet Lederman and Olga Yatskevitch, the project built on the scholarship of the publications *What They Saw* and *How We See*, emphasizing visibility and access as forms of redress.
- By encouraging slow looking and tactile engagement, the reading room dissolved traditional barriers between viewer and object. The exhibition also introduced photobooks by artists and publishers from Northern Virginia and the greater Washington, D.C. region. Co-curated by Stephanie Grimm, Art and Exhibitions Librarian, and J. Carrier, Assoc. Professor, School of Art, *HWSWTS* demonstrated how libraries inspire future scholarships by making marginalized histories accessible, visible, and valued.

HWSWTS engaged the campus community beyond the gallery walls through a series of artist and faculty-led talks on photobook history and practice. It also drew creative responses from students. Avery Shippen, Graphic Design/Conflict Analysis, reflected on how seeing *HWSWTS* shaped her own exhibition project, *A Seat at the Table*, which merged performance and design to create a mock dinner-table featuring tea settings with the names of forgotten historic women. In November 2025, Shippen and students from the course "Art as Social Action" held a performance of *A Seat at the Table* within Fenwick Gallery, underscoring *HWSWTS* as a site of historical recovery, and as a catalyst for new artistic production, dialogue, and performance rooted in feminist scholarship.



How We See What They Saw, installation view/North American sections.

The Mirage of Ancient Egypt: Exploring Egypt's Legacy in Popular Culture

(December 5, 2025–February 13, 2026)

Following a successful collaboration on *Loving Krishna*, we were excited to work with the "Curating an Exhibition" seminar again in fall 2025. Led by Dr. Jacquelyn Williamson Assoc. Professor, Art History, and head student curator Katie Nitz, BA Art History, 2025, students faced the challenge of creating an exhibition about ancient cultures while not having access to ancient artifacts and materials.

To address this, the class shifted focus to a contemporary context. *The Mirage of Ancient Egypt* examined how ideas of ancient Egypt have been received over the centuries, often filtered through a lens of Orientalism and exoticism. Told through a provocative range of materials including film posters, tarot decks, fashion, album covers, music videos, TikToks, toys, and novels, the exhibit explored connected themes of consumption, spirituality, and fantasy to challenge and reflect on how historic and contemporary beliefs have shaped current interpretations of ancient Egypt.

The class also organized a one-day symposium in Fenwick Library featuring scholars from Egyptian art history, archaeology, and anthropology. Students, Janel Girard BA Art History, 2026, and Meryem Tanis BA Art History and History, 2026, both spoke about the invaluable learning experience of organizing both the exhibit and symposium. Girard added, "I hope it broadens others' understandings of ancient Egypt and how what seems like a small misunderstanding in history can lead to harmful rhetoric that remains relevant today. This does not apply only to ancient Egypt, but to all cultures historians study."

This year's exhibitions reveal how inspiration can emerge through access, collaboration, and thoughtful engagement, and how Fenwick Gallery serves to support student and faculty scholarship, emerging artists, and underrepresented histories. Each exhibition added a new chapter to the gallery's ongoing story, offering visitors opportunities to reflect, interact, and expand their understanding of art, culture, and the world around them. ■

Prof. Jacquelyn Williamson and students from Art History 495/595: Curating an Exhibition seminar, Fall 2025.



Learning on the Job

with Mason Publishing

By Jennifer Miller

The Mason Publishing Group provides services to support the creation, curation, dissemination, and preservation of scholarly, creative, and educational works by and for the George Mason community through its two imprints: GMU Press and 123 Press. Visit publishing.gmu.edu to learn more!

As an English Literature graduate student, I'm very interested in the publishing industry. Prior to starting my first semester at George Mason University back in 2023, I had zero publishing experience apart from working at my local bookstore. I decided to pursue the Publishing Practice Certificate here at George Mason, alongside my Literature MA degree, because it's always been a dream of mine to work with books and support authors.

At the start of my graduate student career, I was fortunate enough to be hired as the Graduate Research Assistant for Mason Publishing Group (MPG), an academic press within the University Libraries.

During my time working with MPG, I have gained background knowledge and experience that has helped me gain a deeper understanding of the publishing process.

Coming into my first semester, I was most interested in working within the acquisitions department at a publishing company. My GRA advisor and the Director of MPG, Andrew Rouner, allowed me to work first-hand with the proposals and manuscripts submitted to MPG for publication. This was my first time working in an acquisitions role, and although being the sole eye on submissions and determining whether or not they should be considered for publication can be a lot of pressure, I really enjoyed the work. I was able to gain hands-on experience with the proposal process, learning how to differentiate a good submission from a strong one.

Over the course of my almost three years assisting MPG, I was able to not only work with acquisitions, but also gain experience by pitching books for publication, sitting in on meetings with potential authors, learning the publication cycle and workflow, and gaining insight into the design and marketing process. This experience with MPG worked hand-in-hand with my Publishing Practice Certificate and gave me context and knowledge of the publishing industry that I could bring to my classes and vice-versa. Some of the classes I took for my certificate included Proposal Writing, Document Design, and Interning with Stillhouse Press, all of which I was able to bring to my work with MPG.

Academic publishing wasn't really on my radar prior to this job, but I now have experience that I can take with me no matter what area of publishing I pursue. The foundational skills learned from Andrew and his team are transferable to many corners of the publishing world. You really couldn't ask for a better Director; anyone interested in working with MPG would have a great advisor in Andrew and would be able to learn about design from Hannah McLaughlin, the Design and Production Lead. A small press like MPG allows all involved to see the whole publishing process and work within the entire editorial pipeline. From proposal submission to the editing process, peer-review, author meetings, layout and design, marketing - you get a behind the scenes view of all of it.

If you are a graduate student who is interested in gaining publishing industry experience, or who wants to pursue the Publishing Practice Certificate, I highly recommend reaching out to MPG! My assistantship not only helped further build my resume, but it also gave me knowledge to utilize in my classes and my future career and allowed me to get my foot in the door of an industry that can be hard to navigate without prior experience. ■



Jennifer Miller

Q&A with Dan Walsch, author of *Walking for Me*

Moderated by Arthur Andrew Rouner

Daniel Walsch, PhD, is a communications professional and the author of several books, including *Walking for Me*, his autobiography published through the 123 Press imprint of Mason Publishing. In helping to bring this title to print I have had many conversations with Dan, but I wanted to take the opportunity to follow up on some of those conversations and share his answers with the wider University Libraries community.



Dan Walsch

You're officially "retired" after many years at George Mason, but I know you're still involved with George Mason. What have you been doing at the university since your retirement?

I've had an opportunity to continue teaching part-time in the Communications department, and so I took advantage of that, because it's something I enjoy. I continued to do that for a few years, and while doing that, it was around that time the university started setting up shop in South Korea. It seemed like a fun opportunity to look into the possibility of going over there to help teach for at least a semester. It might be a good adventure, and something my wife and I could enjoy.

We came back to Fairfax in January of 2019. And at that point, I was thinking, "Okay, finally we're going to be officially 100% retired." But shortly after that, the provost's office reached out to me and asked if I'd be interested in joining the faculty for a Bachelor of Science degree program that they had been offering for a few years.

Let's talk a little about *Walking for Me*. What inspired you to write an autobiography? And how did you hope it might inspire others?

I took different areas and aspects of my life—family, education, professional life, etc.—and tell my story in that way. I told my story in a way as if I was observing it, as opposed to being in it, in a way that was a bit detached. I ultimately decided to tell my story in different categories or sections, as a reporter, looking at me, as opposed to being me, if that makes sense.

There's always the bottom-line question. You come up with something, and then the question is, "Well, so what?" I tried to address that question in terms of telling my story. The person who might read this book might relate to my challenge in dealing with this dichotomy, and it is something they could hopefully learn from or relate to as they deal with their own challenges.

What are some of the other writing and book projects you've been working on? What led you to start working on those?

My focus initially was on books related to public relations, communications, and media relations. I was fortunate enough to have them published, and have textbooks picked up in universities and colleges throughout the country, including George Mason- so that was fun.

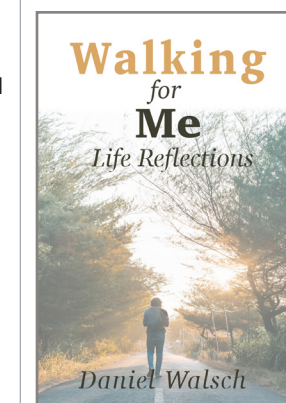
I started dabbling in other topics, and I published a children's book and what I loosely call a humor book. I've been continuing to work on communication books. A new book just came out on listening, one aspect of communication I feel strongly about. I just received a copy of it, just the other day, as a matter of fact. I also just completed a textbook for this class that I'm teaching online, which is making its debut this semester. Hopefully it'll be okay, satisfactory to the students and the program itself.

Of course, probably the book I'm most proud of is the book that I worked on with you and Mason Publishing, *Walking for Me*. That was a unique joy. Something that has been just a major highlight in my life.

Finally, what led you to bring your book to Mason Publishing?

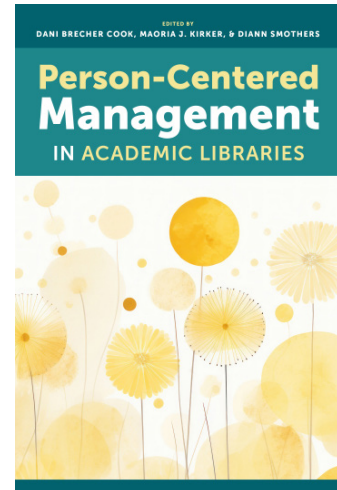
I saw this as an opportunity to work with the university. I know that the university press has done excellent work and has a great reputation, and I thought it might be worth a try to see if they might be open to that, and as it turned out, they—were. So it's worked out very well, and everyone has just been just wonderful, more than I could have ever hoped for. I just feel very blessed about that. ■

Front cover of *Walking for Me: Life Reflections*, Dan Walsch's autobiography published through 123 Press.



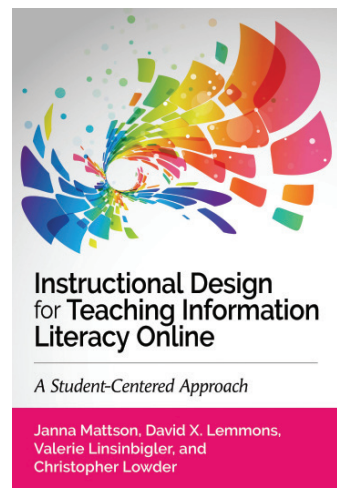
Fresh off the Press

Published works by George Mason University Libraries faculty.



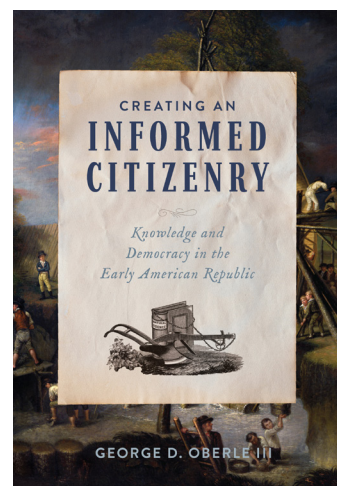
Person-Centered Management in Academic Libraries

Offering a previously unexplored way for academic library managers to frame their work, **Maoria J. Kirker's** co-edited book *Person-Centered Management* interweaves theory, practice, and reflection to investigate the ways in which person-centered management can close the gap between managers and other library staff. Stemming from insights presented at the Conference on Academic Library Management (CALM), editors Maoria J. Kirker, Dani Cook, and Diann Smothers and contributing authors define the concept of person-centered management in the context of libraries; explain why it offers such a valuable framework for improving workplace conditions; discuss building person-centered systems; and share positive, proactive management practices that create space for criticism, sharing of lived experiences, and a willingness to investigate and make changes to the status quo.



Instructional Design for Teaching Information Literacy Online: A Student-Centered Approach

Given the increasing demand for online classes in higher education, librarians who teach students how to engage in research need to be equally skilled in teaching online as well as face-to-face. George Mason librarians **Janna Mattson, David Lemmons, and Christopher Lowder** had this in mind when writing *Instructional Design for Teaching Information Literacy Online: A Student-Centered Approach*. Their book introduces an array of approaches for library instructors who are new to online instruction or who need guidance in adapting increasing demands for online teaching. With light-hearted tips, advice, learning activities, lesson plan examples, rubrics, and worksheets, *Instructional Design* uses classic pedagogical models to help library instructors address the social and emotional needs of diverse online learners, giving instructors the confidence to create successful learning experiences.



Creating an Informed Citizenry: Knowledge and Democracy in the Early American Republic

Amidst the founding of their new system of government, the founders understood that a republic required an active and educated polity. But who would validate the quality of the extensive and diffused information produced in the new republic? **George Oberle's** book *Creating an Informed Citizenry: Knowledge and Democracy in the Early American Republic* answers that question through a comprehensive account of how Americans used institutions to create, circulate, and consume knowledge between 1780-1860. Oberle's analysis of the shift from the desire to create a leadership class to the establishment of citizen participation in knowledge production offers insights into our current information ecology and resonates with our own rapidly evolving media landscape amid contested meanings of what it means to be an informed citizen in a republic.

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The University Libraries hosted its Library Awards Celebration on April 27, 2026 to celebrate our George Mason Community 2025-2026 award recipients.

Undergraduate Research Prize 2026



Brenna Elchenko

The 2026 Undergraduate Student Research Prize was awarded to Brenna Elchenko for her paper “The Implications of Artificial Intelligence on Forensic Biometrics.”

Elchenko proposes the development of a system that links artificial intelligence to biometric evidence analysis and collection software in order to increase human accuracy when forming conclusions related to biometric evidence. Elchenko included a robust literature review and a two-year, detailed design implementation plan. The committee was impressed by Elchenko’s comprehensiveness and professionalism and the potential utility of the proposal to the forensic science discipline.



This year’s committee was comprised of Alyssa Fahringer, Chair, Digital Humanities Librarian, Marissa Burkland, Sciences and Data Librarian, Margaret Calkins, Physical Sciences and STEM Data Librarian, Kathy Perry, Advisory Board Member.

Registered Student Organization Fellowship 2026

The Registered Student Organization Fellowship is awarded annually to an academic or service-oriented Registered Student Organization (RSO) at George Mason University to provide a space for community building with the University Libraries and within the RSO. In addition to having available space for RSO meetings, the Fellowship awards funds for library-centered events or programming. Any RSO with an academic or service-oriented mission is eligible and encouraged to apply. The selection committee is especially interested in Fellowship applications with a vision for how they might collaborate with the University Libraries during the academic year.

No Lost Generation @ George Mason (also known as NLG @ Mason), winner of the 2026 RSO Fellowship, is an independent, nonpartisan student organization dedicated to advocating for refugee access to higher education. Their work is driven by student volunteers under the following categories: Community Relations and Communications, Policy and Advocacy, and Administration and Finance. NLG works with major NGOs, government, and universities to mobilize students across the nation to craft creative, long-term solutions to global displacement issues.



This year’s selection committee was comprised of Audrey Richardson, Chair, First Year Experience Librarian, Christopher Lowder, Education Librarian, and Lynn E. Eaton, Director, Special Collections Research Center.

Graduate Research Fellow 2026



Xiaorong “Sherry” Shan

The University Libraries are excited to be recognizing, Xiaorong “Sherry” Shan, for her research on *Estimating Air Quality from Source-Specific Exposure for Future Application in Environmental Regulations Analyses*.

Shan’s research uses historical emissions data and advanced air-quality models to understand how pollution from individual sources has affected communities across different decades. This work provides a quantitative foundation to evaluate the effectiveness of environmental regulations and establishes a transferable modeling framework for assessing source-specific air pollution exposure in data-scarce contexts, supporting more equitable and evidence-based environmental health policy making.

This prize was established and made possible through philanthropic gifts from donors.



This year’s selection committee was comprised of Michael Hunter, Chair, Resource Sharing Librarian, Elena Landry, Global Programs and Foreign Languages Librarian, Lorena Jordan, Policy and Government Librarian, Kathleen Kehoe, Advisory Board Member.



Members of No Lost Generation @ George Mason receiving an award from Anne Osterman, Dean of Libraries.

Student Assistant Scholarships 2026

Two graduate students were selected to receive the University Libraries Student Assistant Scholarship for the 2026-2027 academic year.



Jeeho Sohn

Graduate Research Assistant in
Administrative Services

The Student Assistant Scholarship endowment for the libraries was established through Giving Day efforts by the generosity of the University Libraries Advisory Board and George Mason alumni, faculty, staff, and friends of the university. The purpose of the endowment is to award scholarships each year in order to assist student employees of the libraries with their educational expenses.

Jeeho is a first-year Ph.D. student studying Industrial Organizational Psychology at George Mason University. Her role at the libraries involved working closely on the Building Visioning project, a project which aims to develop a strategic 10-year plan for University Libraries spaces. Her research interests include personality-performance relations, personality assessment, performance feedback, and pursuing an academic career as a professor.



Deepika Prasad

Graduate Professional Assistant in
University Dissertation and Thesis
Services

Deepika is pursuing her PhD in Bioinformatics and Computational Biology and has been working towards understanding the complexities of the Breast Cancer Microenvironment in hopes of becoming an official PhD candidate in the coming months. Her role at the libraries involved being the webmaster for the UDTs website, having to design and conceptualize content, while actively helping in devising plans that are directed towards student participation, involvement and well-being, and hold drop-in office hours for consultations on thesis/dissertation formatting.



This year's selection committee was comprised of Michael Hunter, Chair, Resource Sharing Librarian, Elena Landry, Global Programs and Foreign Languages Librarian, Steven Levenson, Advisory Board Member.

Fenwick Fellow

Dr. Samaine Lockwood

The University Libraries are pleased to award Dr. Samaine Lockwood, Associate Professor, Department of English, the 2026 Fenwick Fellowship for her research project, "Tituba Indian: The History of an American Cultural Figure."

Project Summary

The Salem witch trials have been a popular subject for literary re-creation since the early 19th century. Lockwood's book will provide the first comprehensive account of this literary history by focusing on the role Tituba Indian has played within this body of literature and examining the cultural work that women of color are called on to perform in relation to theories of democracy, citizenship, and belonging. Lockwood taught the English Honors seminar "The Witches of American Literature" in fall 2024, which explored representations of the witch in American culture from the Civil War to the 21st century, particularly in the long shadow of the Salem Witch Trials.

Tituba Indian was an enslaved woman of color and was the first person accused of practicing witchcraft in the Salem Witch Trials of 1692, which has been a popular subject for literary recreation since the early nineteenth century. Professor Lockwood's book provides the first comprehensive account of this literary history by focusing on the role Tituba Indian has played within this body of literature and examining the cultural work that women of color are called on to perform in relation to theories of democracy, citizenship, and belonging.

The Fellowship funds will cover an immersive trip for Professor Lockwood to Salem, Massachusetts, the site of the Salem Witch Trials, as well as the purchase of key works to enhance the collections within the University Libraries that support this research and relevant courses for students.

Future Presentation

Professor Lockwood will present the outcomes of this project at a future Fenwick Fellow Lecture hosted by the University Libraries. ■



Distinguished Library Faculty Award 2026

The University Libraries is proud to announce that the winner of the Distinguished Library Faculty Award for 2026 is **David Lemmons!** The selection committee was “very impressed by the range and breadth of the letters of support written for Lemmons’ nomination, including letters from their colleagues at University Libraries, George Mason faculty and administrators, and library staff and administrators outside of Mason, all of which indicated that Lemmons has ‘a strong reputation among their colleagues and outside the institution.’” They highlighted David’s creation and management of the libraries’ Teaching Institute, work with the Composition program to revise the curriculum to better integrate information literacy, PhD research and numerous publications and presentations on the topic of instruction and information literacy, and invitation as the Keynote/ Plenary Speaker at the 2026 Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Summit, 2026 LOEX Conference, and 2026 SoTL Commons Conference.



This year’s selection committee was comprised of Jen Fehsenfeld, Chair, Team Lead, Arts & Humanities, English and Philosophy Librarian, Mieko Palazzo, Research Services Librarian, Michael Hunter, Resource Sharing Librarian, and Lynn Eaton, Director, Special Collections Research Center.

“We were impressed by the range and depth of their activities, as well as all of the national conferences that invited them to be a keynote or plenary speaker this year.”

—Jen Fehsenfeld
Team Lead, Arts & Humanities, English and Philosophy Librarian

David Lemmons receiving an award from Anne Osterman, Dean of Libraries.



Staff Excellence Awards 2026

Becca Arm

In her role as Document Delivery Coordinator, Becca’s robust institutional knowledge, dedication to supporting colleagues, and enthusiastic engagement nourishes an environment of accessibility. Regarding her work on the Mason Square Library graphic novel collection, her colleagues noted: “Despite collection development being far outside her responsibilities, Becca not only embraced the project—she transformed it. She created a thoughtful, time saving recommendation list for subject librarians and curated a robust Zotero bibliography highlighting the scholarly use of graphic novels in the social sciences.” Becca also demonstrates outstanding flexibility and dedication to the library’s mission. As one nominator shared, “Becca routinely adjusts her schedule—coming in early, staying late, or shifting hours—to ensure Mason Square Library remains open and fully staffed. This flexibility is never asked of her; she simply steps up because she cares deeply about the library and the people who rely on it.” We’re pleased to help recognize her contributions.



Rose Nelson

Rose’s contributions to the Staff Council, Mason Staff Senate, Social Events Committee, and student outreach events demonstrate how her impact reaches across campus, benefiting all classified staff at George Mason University Libraries. Her colleagues note that, “Rose has developed meaningful relationships with colleagues across the university, which has also enhanced partnerships with the library. Because of Rose’s willingness to go above and beyond, other library staff see her as a supportive and reliable colleague.” She regularly goes above and beyond—staying late or coming in early to set up or break down events, maintaining organization, and ensuring every detail is handled. As one colleague shared, “Rose has been an absolute rock for our outreach and events here at the University Libraries. She not only orders supplies, snacks, prizes whatever you need but will also meet you at Costco in person to get items week of the event. Rose is so kind and will check in with me the day before or day of an event to see if she can help out in any way. The amount of events that Rose has helped, planned, and volunteered to work in her short time here is incredible.” Her nominators describe her as “extremely cross-departmental and cross-campus” and “a creative problem-solver.” The genuine appreciation expressed in her nominations makes clear her collaborative spirit and the expertise she brings to every space she’s part of.



This year’s committee was comprised of Roshan Panjwani, Chair, Teaching and Learning Specialist, Teddi Kabler, Interlibrary Loan Specialist, and Lauren Knoche, Access and Outreach Specialist.



Years of Service

The following University Libraries faculty and staff were recognized for their service to George Mason University and/or the Commonwealth of Virginia at the Green and Gold Service Award Celebration on November 18, 2025 (20-45 years of service) and November 19, 2025 (5-15 years of service).

5 Years

Ashley Blinstrub

Student Success & Inclusion Librarian

Stephen Brown

Collection Maintenance Specialist

Claudia Giliberti

HR Generalist

David Heilbrun

Director, Discovery Services

Mel Kujat

Collection Analysis Specialist

David Lemmons

Instruction Coordinator

Christopher Lowder

Education Librarian

Emily Nilson

Report Engineering Specialist

Arthur Andrew Rouner

Director, Mason Publishing Group & GMU Press

Nicole Story

E-Resources Specialist

Trevor Watkins

Teaching & Outreach Librarian

10 Years

Maoria Kirker

Director, Teaching & Learning

Kat Bell

Strategic Planning & Grants Lead

Kaitlyn Kinney

Head, Access Services

John Sherman

Manager, Mercer Library

Amy Sullivan

Preservation Officer

15 Years

Dorothee Schubel

Head, Cataloging & Metadata

20 Years

Jen Fehsenfeld

Lead, Arts & Humanities Team

25 Years

Paul Coley

Cataloging & Binding Specialist

35 Years

Jib Vititpongs

Cataloging Specialist

Donor Recognition

The University Libraries gratefully acknowledges the following donors who made gifts and grants of \$100 or more from July 1st 2024 through December 31st 2025.

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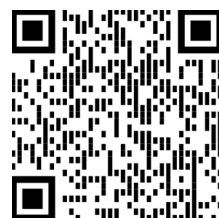
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