Application for ACRL Excellence in Academic Libraries Award, 2010

Campus Context

The University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), a vibrant, young institution in southern Nevada, is intent on creating a research university for the 21st century—one that is embedded in its environment and engaged in its community—one that values innovation and entrepreneurship in teaching and learning, as well as in research and scholarship. We are an institution with a desire to hold on to and improve upon our core teaching mission, even as we grow into a major research university. We are rooted in a state, region, and city that are ground zero for national issues such as environmental sustainability, urban growth and over growth, and economic and cultural diversity. The challenges of creating hard and soft infrastructure for health and human services, education, environmental policy, and building and sustaining cultural institutions, present rich fodder for our faculty and students to study. Our faculty, students, and staff enthusiastically confront these challenges and incorporate them into our research and educational programs. Las Vegas is truly our laboratory for learning.

UNLV has 28,000 students and 3300 full-time faculty in 220 degree programs. There are 6300 graduate students in 120 graduate programs, including 38 doctoral and professional programs. We are a young university, founded in 1957; however, we are ambitious and entrepreneurial, even in the face of the worst economic set back ever experienced by our city and state. In the face of these challenges, the prestigious Washington, D.C. based Brookings Institution selected us as the site of its Brookings Mountain West initiative—a significant research partnership between the University and Brookings that focuses on “helping metropolitan areas like Las Vegas grow in robust, inclusive, and sustainable ways.”

Developed during the 50th year of UNLV’s existence, our “Focus: 50-100” strategic plan underscores a commitment to student learning as we plan for the next 50 years of the University’s development. Prior to 2007, we had been on a trajectory of rapid growth in both hiring and creation of new academic programs. However, in the last three years we have sustained a 30% cumulative budget cut from the state, which has resulted in an over 10% reduction in full-time faculty, a 25% cut in part-time faculty, a loss of more than 260 professional and classified staff positions, and the elimination or consolidation of six academic departments.

Keeping on Top of National Trends

The changing demographics of students and a realization that many may not be ready for college-level coursework impact the collaborations the Libraries seek and our outlook on student success in providing instructional support services and engaging the community. A focus on accountability in higher education and a demand from the workforce for better-prepared graduates have shaped our work with students and faculty as we create improved assessment mechanisms. Constant advances in information technology continue to be a common thread in the evolution of all of our library functions. We seek out higher education reports such as AAC&U’s College Learning for the New Global Century: A Report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America’s Promise (The “LEAP” Report); the Delta Cost Project’s Trends in College Spending, 1998-2008; and George Kuh’s High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter, to inform our planning and practice.
Even during this time of reduction campus-wide, we are dedicated to increasing student success, revisioning undergraduate education—both what is taught and how it is delivered, and engaging students more effectively in the first year. UNLV has been innovative in building new structures to enact these goals, for example, the creation of a well-staffed Academic Success Center, which hosts all tutoring and student support services as well as a newly devised diagnostic testing and intervention program.

**Libraries Environment**

The UNLV Libraries are intentionally creating the research library of the future, within a framework of creativity and innovation supported by our campus and its users. We are shifting the perception of the library from being at the center of campus to the center of student learning. In the process, we have strategically influenced and identified campus priorities and redefined our role and how we relate to our colleagues on campus. At the core of our strategic plan and directions, our vision and mission statements underscore this reframing—foremost, a focus on student learning and a seamless integration with the mission of our institution.

The UNLV Libraries are comprised of the Lied Library and three branch libraries—Architecture Studies, Music, and Curriculum Materials. We have a collection of more than 1.3 million physical volumes, a rich specialized collection, a developed digital infrastructure, and the proven ability to capitalize on new technologies. Our highly skilled and innovative staff of over 100 (37 of whom are faculty librarians) are our greatest asset, as they live the Libraries’ mission and values in both day-to-day work and in unique collaborations.

In response to our successful bid for membership in the Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA) in 2008, the review team recognized us for our “aggressive and effective instruction, curriculum design, and assessment program that measures students’ skill gaps and helps develop custom learning solutions.” Further, during UNLV’s spring 2010 ten-year accreditation review by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), the visiting team commended the spirit of the university and the place of the Libraries within it.

**Vision**

The UNLV Libraries will define the new academic research library—bringing people and information together in innovative ways. As UNLV emerges as a leading urban research institution, the Libraries will pioneer dynamic, user-focused methods of reaching, connecting, and engaging learners.

**Mission**

In support of the University’s mission and shared values, the Libraries contribute to and support self-sufficient learners who can discover, access, and use information effectively for academic success, research, and life-long learning.

“The Commission commends the University of Nevada, Las Vegas for its exceptional sense of community and solidarity in the face of literally unprecedented fiscal challenges,” and “…finds laudable the establishment by the University, in particular its libraries, of a highly effective and robust program of assessment data gathering that is used on an ongoing basis to improve resources and services, the libraries’ leadership in promoting greater information literacy as an integral part of the student learning experience, and an exemplary commitment to providing modern and spacious library facilities in support of teaching and research.”

—Sandra Elman, President, NWCCU
Creating Culture Shift Inside and Out

**Within our Institution**

Despite the significant economic blow to our institution, there have been a number of opportunities to integrate the Libraries into the educational mission of the university—a position for which we have been strategically laying the groundwork for some years. It is our philosophy that as budgets get tight, instruction is protected, so the strategic positioning of the Libraries at the center of that educational mission is intentional and has paid off. We have accomplished this “centering” through a model of identifying “strategic hooks” in the environment; influencing those hooks through strategic placement of library staff and by building solid collaborations; and using those hooks to develop or highlight initiatives that impact student learning. We have developed strategic directions, actions, and assessments around:

- leading the campus in ensuring that faculty and students have the skills and abilities necessary to find the best information possible;
- integrating the library into campus educational initiatives especially those emphasizing student success, universal learning outcomes and curricular improvement; and
- collaborating to educate faculty and others regarding ways to incorporate collections and services into educational experiences for students.

In addition, we have been able to showcase our expertise in finding and creating opportunities to contribute to and develop collaborations in response to a recent accreditation review and strategic planning focus; the need to do more with less in response to budget cuts; and in forwarding and documenting student learning. We have provided a visual model of how this culture shift has permeated our organization in Appendix I.

**Within the Libraries**

Assessment has been a focal point for development over the last three years. We now have two full-time positions dedicated to this activity: an Assessment Librarian and a Statistician. We created a new model for library assessment beginning with an evaluation framework that has “impact of the library on its users” at its core. The evaluation plan guides our Libraries Strategic Plan (Appendix II), which in turn has resulted in a culture where everyone in the organization has a role and responsibility to contribute to outcomes-based assessment for our strategic directions. Infrastructure supporting a culture of data collection for evidence-based decision making and continuous improvement includes:

- a data matrix formalizing all of the data elements the Libraries are committed to collecting;
- a database that staff members are responsible for populating with data, including a charting function enabling us to look at trends;
- evaluation questions and a mix of formal and informal assessments established for each strategic plan direction; and
- semi-annual reporting on strategic plan action items.
Closing the Loop: Putting Feedback and Data to Use

Staff throughout the Libraries are using multiple sources of data and feedback to inform their work. Examples include:

- Liaisons use data from multiple sources to inform their interactions with disciplinary faculty, including circulation data, college faculty surveys and focus groups, expenditure information, interlibrary loan statistics, cost-per-use figures, LibQual+ data and comments, and institutional data, such as FTE and new program reports.
- New computers were added to the quiet section of the main Lied Library in response to LibQual+ comments on both equipment availability and need for quiet computer stations. In addition, we set up a kiosk with LabMaps software to provide real-time visual representation of which public computers are open.
- Staffing decisions are based on data from multiple sources including budget and use data; outsourcing decisions use process review data such as “traveler” studies showing time for each process element.
- An examination of interlibrary loan data on searches led to changing default settings in the Libraries catalog. ILL response and turnaround time track efficiencies and identify areas for improvement.
- A re-design of the Curriculum Materials Library’s website used web statistics to bring the most used items onto the main page, making them easier to find.
- A staff “pulse” survey resulted in expanding general training, and providing targeted management training.
- Reference service points have been consolidated and microfilm services relocated based on use data.
- Student wage and duties data over time was used to create a more equitable structure for student employee classification and wages.

Infrastructure to Support Change

In 2005, we ushered in a new Dean of Libraries. Prior to this time, we had been planning, building, and adjusting to a main library facility (with a 2001 opening date) for a period of fifteen years, and much of our organizational effort was focused there. The new Dean arrived at UNLV with a wealth of leadership experience in the area of information literacy, both nationally and “on the ground” at the institutions where she had worked previously. Through her work with the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), she is also influential in the national dialog of higher education reform, especially in the realm of undergraduate education. As we were attracted to her for these reasons, she was drawn to UNLV and its Libraries for the great potential she saw here to make an impact in the area of student learning. She has made intentional internal and external communications and the building of organizational capacity through strategic hiring and training top priorities over the past five years.

A new External Relations unit has promoted our message to external groups—both on the campus and in the community. A marketing and publications campaign reflects a consistent look and feel and promotes the Libraries’ messaging trifecta of partnering in education, supporting research and scholarly work, and engaging the community. Each issue of our “Connections” newsletter highlights at least one initiative—usually a collaboration between the Libraries and another campus unit—that illustrates how we impact student learning (see “Connections” example in Appendix III). We have also shifted our fundraising from books and bricks to student learning by launching an “Undergraduate Initiative” as the Libraries’ focus in the campus campaign (see Appendix IV).
During this campaign, the Libraries successfully:

- endowed the Mason Peer Research Coaches Program at $1 million;
- endowed the Lance and Elena Calvert Undergraduate Research Prize at $200,000; and
- received two designated estate gifts totaling over $3 million.

We have also successfully negotiated for all alumni to be considered Libraries alumni, commenced our first-ever direct mail campaign (with over 200 new donors in the pipeline), and the Libraries are now included in the annual campus telephone campaign.

In the last five years, we have built capacity through strategic hiring and “ramping up” of areas in the Libraries identified as priorities. Even in difficult budget times, the UNLV administration has supported the Libraries in defining new and existing professional and faculty librarian lines into an organizational structure to aggressively support student-focused innovation. Positions include:

- the assessment and external relations staff;
- a group of staff members focused on application programming and development, website design, development of digital collections, and database design and programming;
- an instructional designer and a multimedia designer, who work with liaison librarians to embed information literacy into the curriculum and also to assist in creating curriculum for faculty development initiatives; and
- a sustainability librarian, who is focused on seeking out and capturing local and regional content in support of the UNLV Sustainability initiative, Brookings Mountain West initiative, and others.

### Focusing on Customer Values: A Restructured Technical Services Division

By subscribing to the “Lean” method of management, staff in our Technical Services Division make efficiency and service effectiveness their top priorities. Most significant is the Division’s reframing of their work to address the values of the Libraries’ customers. Backlogs, slow turnaround times, and isolated departments may be problems that plague technical services work nationwide; however, the realization of Technical Services staff that prompt access to information for our students is in their hands has created buy-in to the Lean method of process improvement. The overall premise is that back-end processes have to be working efficiently and effectively to forward our values as a library. By cross-training staff and undertaking process reviews to streamline workflow, one senior position has been eliminated and another two positions have been freed up for reassignment. Processes that previously spanned departments and were managed in pieces now flow more smoothly. According to our Director of Technical Services, “Lean is an easy-to-learn and easy-to-implement method to improve efficiencies or to repair damaged or long-ignored processes.” What she appreciates most about Lean is that it “reduces the need for a more drastic, often uninformed, top-down reorganization; instead, it involves those closest and most invested in the actual work to establish their own culture of continuous improvement.”
In addition to strategic hiring, we established a robust training program in the Libraries beginning with an in-depth needs assessment. We have brought in speakers and consultants and identified staff to attend training offered by the university. We have created a “Middle Managers Group” with a rotating chair to focus exclusively on professional development issues for managers and have licensed Harvard ManageMentor for self-directed online learning. Overall, this training program has allowed staff to share their knowledge with one another and has addressed management training, communication, and other skills necessary for the facilitation of change. Also, individual development of staff through funded training and travel has remained a priority even during budget cutbacks.

**Positioning the Libraries as Partners in Student Learning**

*Professor Marcia Gallo, a participant in the Faculty Institute for Research-Based Learning in High Impact Courses, changes the way she teaches her beginning history course.*

*Thomas Joseph Birmingham, David Huggins, and Junichi Miyamoto, senior history majors, each receive the 2010 Lance and Elena Calvert Award for Undergraduate Research.*

*Graduate students Sherrie Bakelar and Mandy Crispin work with Libraries Humanities Liaison to design tutorials for history courses during summer fellowships.*

*Liesl Carr-Childers, an assistant researcher, works on the Nevada Test Site Oral History Project and receives the first Dr. Hal K. Rothman Doctoral History Graduate Student Endowment.*

What might seem like random events were actually intentionally constructed by us to complement each other and, together, create a framework for deep collaboration between the Libraries and the academic departments; in this example, the history department. The relationship between the history department and the Libraries demonstrates the depth and complexity of the Libraries’ role in the students’ educational experience: starting with faculty by working with them on assignment design; then by focusing on students at the beginning, middle, and end of their undergraduate academic careers; then by supporting graduate students as scholars and as teachers; and finally by partnering with scholars to create new content.

“The Libraries are nurturing undergraduate research, from the large introductory survey classes to the advanced senior capstone projects, in ways that will advantage our students as they compete with others for places in graduate school, professional schools, and in the job market.”

—Dr. Dave Wrobel, Chair, Department of History
**Librarians as Leaders**

The university’s strategic planning emphasis on undergraduate education reform was influenced by and has resulted in further involvement and leadership of Libraries staff:

- UNLV has sent selective working teams to three AAC&U Institutes to develop and further its educational goals. A librarian has been a member of all three Institute teams, and most often is the only librarian in attendance among up to 30 campus teams at each Institute.
- The Committee on the Culture of Teaching and Learning (CCTL), charged by the Executive Vice President and Provost and co-created and chaired by the Dean of Libraries, has been a catalyst for campus discussions about undergraduate education reform. Library staff members have played leadership roles in the creation of campus-wide events to launch these discussions.
- UNLV’s General Education Advisory Committee (GEAC) was charged in 2007 with developing a plan for general education reform, with two librarians appointed to the group.
- A librarian was on the GEAC sub-committee charged to write the outcomes for oral and written communication and a second librarian chaired the sub-committee for developing student learning outcomes in Inquiry and Critical Thinking. These were two of the five outcomes areas deemed as most important.
- From chairing the subcommittee, this librarian then took on the position of Assistant for Academic Programs in the Provost’s office focusing on undergraduate education initiatives. While there, she was charged to assist with the creation of a proposal for how new student learning outcomes would be integrated into the curriculum for undergraduates.
- The CCTL has now been reconstituted as the Consortium for Faculty Professional Opportunities (CFPO). The Libraries have three members on this group, a greater representation than any other campus unit, and continue to use this forum to reinforce with faculty the importance of the Inquiry and Critical Thinking student learning outcomes, among others, for undergraduates.
- The Dean of Libraries has recently been appointed chair of the General Education Task Force, to guide approval and implementation of a proposal for undergraduate education reform.

**Creating the Spaces for Conversation**

The Committee on the Culture of Teaching and Learning (CCTL)—charged by the Executive Vice President and Provost and co-created and chaired by the Dean of Libraries—along with many library staff members, designed and facilitated several campus-wide events for faculty and others to learn about and discuss undergraduate education. These include:

- A faculty retreat identifying then prioritizing several broad areas for UNLV student learning outcomes. This was the first step in a three-year undergraduate education reform process.
- A workshop on the capstone experience, featuring national expert David Sill.
- A workshop for campus-wide vetting of the proposed UNLV undergraduate learning outcomes.
- A workshop on the integration of high-impact educational practices into the academic and co-curricular experiences of students, featuring AAC&U’s Vice President for Quality, Curriculum & Assessment, Terry Rhodes.
Our Students as Peer Teachers
Librarians develop innovative programs to encourage student retention. One initiative, the endowed Mason Undergraduate Peer Research Coaches Program, now in its fourth year, recruits at-risk undergraduates and trains them to serve as front-line research mentors to their peers. The most impressive benefit of the program is that it allows students to focus mainly on graduating while also doing meaningful work. As one of our first coaches, now graduated, explained: “As first-generation university students, we appreciate how flexible schedules and the collegial atmosphere of the library lessen the amount of stress typical college students endure. We don’t have a typical workday. One day we could be hosting a library tour, and the next we could be assisting a graduate student with challenging research. We assist at the reference desks and during instruction courses. This has taught us to adapt to different situations as well as broadened our academic horizons. Nothing compares with this opportunity. One of the best ways to learn is to teach others, and with this job, the opportunity is handed to us every day.” Through this program, the Libraries are living our values and exhibiting what we know about how students best succeed in college. Strategically, this program has also allowed the Libraries to “offer scholarships” to students, thereby tapping into the alumni and donor base of the institution. We now have endowed students who are our core of library alumni, and we have donor opportunities for those interested in scholarships, or more—student success. This program has allowed the Libraries to institutionalize its role vis-à-vis students in a new way.

Making Connections
When Flora Mason heard the concept for the Libraries’ Peer Research Coaches program, she knew it was just right for a campaign gift from her and her husband, Stuart. They wanted their gift to have a direct impact on students and create opportunities for students with financial need. The Peer Coaches program does this and more, providing mentors for each student and teaching skills to help them succeed in college and beyond.

“When we met the students and the team of librarians working with them, I knew the program would succeed. Stuart and I decided to endow it to ensure the program could continue into the future.”

—Flora Mason, Member, Libraries Advisory Board & Donor, Mason Undergraduate Peer Research Coaches
Campus Collaborations
Library staff initiate meaningful collaborations with many administrative, curricular, and co-curricular areas to further student learning. In addition to academic departments, librarians are designated as liaisons to co-curricular and academic support areas including Academic Advisors, Career Services, Student Athletics, International Scholars, the Graduate and Professional Student Association, Distance Education, Student Affairs, and the Academic Success Center. Examples of innovative approaches and noteworthy outcomes include:

- The liaison to the Academic Success Center (ASC) has designed an initiative in collaboration with the director of the center to use the Educational Testing Service’s standardized test of information, communication and technology skills—iCritical Thinking—in the suite of diagnostic tests for students who are admitted to the university with “alternate” status (below the minimum grade point average). Working with advisers and academic coaches in the ASC, instruction librarians have prepared online interventions for students who do not pass the test.
- The liaison to the Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA) has regularly given a workshop on assignment design for graduate teaching assistants, which serves as the only resource on campus for students to get this training.
- The liaison to Student Athletics initiated a READ poster campaign using athletes as the pictured readers. In the course of this campaign, the students became more comfortable relating to “the librarian” assigned to them and are demonstrating a broader incorporation of library resources into their papers.
- The liaison to International Scholars surveyed the students on both their comfort level in the Libraries and their needs for library assistance. As a result, library staff incorporated a new sensitivity to vocabulary and a new understanding of the cultural context of plagiarism into their service approach.

Testing the Test
The Libraries have developed experience with ETS’ iCritical Thinking (formerly iSkills)—a scenario-based Information, Communication, and Technology (ICT) literacy assessment. We conducted a pilot administration of the assessment during the 2008 spring and fall semesters with three populations yielding 446 valid tests. Our 2009 pilot of the revised iCritical Thinking instrument gave us data on another 260 students. Prior to 2010, students tested were primarily regularly admitted first-year students; however, we have now delved into the performance of students on two completely opposite ends of the spectrum with our recent testing of those admitted on probationary status at the beginning and those in capstone experiences at the end of their undergraduate coursework.

“The Libraries working with our new Academic Success Center, is a critical piece of the learning assessment puzzle for our students, and will be instrumental in helping fill the learning gaps our students have through diagnostic vehicles like the iCritical Thinking test. I applaud their foresight in piloting this test on our campus, and look forward to using it to provide students and faculty with information useful in designing opportunities for learning.”

—Neal Smatresk, President, UNLV
**Partners in Curriculum Design**

The Libraries have always partnered with the campus Teaching and Learning Center to offer workshops, match mini-grants for faculty to partner with librarians on course redesign, and otherwise develop opportunities for librarians and faculty to work together. But with the death of the Director and the closure of the Center, we have initiated an even more prominent role in faculty development. We created a collaboration with the Office of Academic Assessment, the Office of Information Technology, and the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost to develop the Faculty Institute for Research-Based Learning in High Impact Courses, through which librarians are collaborating with UNLV faculty to make quality research an integral part of large-enrollment, lower-division courses. During a three-day Institute in January 2010, eight liaison librarians partnered with sixteen teaching faculty, starting a process of course revisions that were implemented during the 2010 academic year. Faculty and liaison librarians continued to meet in a series of follow-up sessions to address learning assessment and using technology to support large-enrollment courses and their redesign progress.

Through the courses that were targeted for this Institute, there is a potential for over 13,000 UNLV undergraduates to experience research-based learning each academic year. The outcomes of the Institute are impressive, both in the changes made to the syllabi of the courses and—most dramatically—in a shift in how the library liaisons are viewed. Almost universally, the faculty in the Institute indicated that what they valued most about the experience was a changed perception of the Libraries and an enhanced relationship with “their” librarian as a partner in curricular design. It is noteworthy that the inaugural Institute was funded by the Libraries Advisory Board, a group of donors committed to the Libraries’ role as partner in the educational mission of the institution.

With the success of the Institute, several colleges and departments have requested custom Institutes for their own faculty. We are currently working with the College of Hotel Administration on an Institute to address total course redesign for their revised core curriculum, including the integration of information literacy and critical thinking learning outcomes among others. Library staff are designing the curriculum and facilitating the Institute. Six liaison librarians will be partnered with Hotel faculty in teams to redesign the six core courses. In preparation for this Institute, 360 capstone students in the College have taken iCritical Thinking to determine the level of ICT literacy demonstrated by these students on the brink of graduation. That information will help inform the selection of learning outcomes and activities for the courses.

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“*One of the best parts of the Institute was the opportunity to work so closely with [Libraries Liaison] Priscilla Finley. I have always appreciated her intelligence, resourcefulness, and helpfulness but to have the time and space to create and problem-solve with her was extremely valuable.*”

—Marcia Gallo, Assistant Professor, on her Faculty Institute experience

“*An important part of the college experience is learning how to learn—being self-directed in getting what you need to succeed. For new students and those not necessarily as well prepared, we need to build bridges for this kind of learning.*”

—Jennifer Lewis, Member, Libraries Advisory Board

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**Developing Undergraduate Researchers**

Two of our librarians presented at the Association of American Colleges & Universities Conference on Undergraduate Research in and Across the Disciplines in November 2010. Presenting to a standing-room only audience of disciplinary faculty and administrators from research institutions, they made the case that for students to be receptive to full-blown undergraduate research experiences, they must develop critical foundational skills beginning in the first year. This “LEAP-featured session” was one of only four at the conference officially designated as implementing promising practices to achieve the essential learning outcomes outlined in the 2007 AAC&U report, *College Learning in the New Global Century*. 
Next-Gen Liaisons

Liaison librarians are assigned to outreach to specific major and program areas. However, these are not just liaisons who buy books, serve on the reference desk, and teach library research skills when called upon. In a multitude of ways, they have developed significant partnerships to embed information literacy into the curricula of their respective departments. Examples include:

- Introductory Skills: SCI 101. The Libraries initiated and participated in the creation of Introduction to Scientific Studies, an introductory course for freshman science majors to introduce them to the study methods, research strategies, and critical-thinking skills necessary to succeed in college. It was co-developed by two library liaisons and a science faculty member. The mandatory course has served as a model for the university and our science liaison has continued to teach the course.

- Large-scale info lit: COM 101. In 2008, our urban affairs liaison launched a project with the Communication Studies Department to provide undergraduates with important opportunities to develop information literacy skills. With the course coordinator, she created a redesigned assignment, a grading rubric, and an instructor outline to be used with more than 30 sections. As this course has evolved to several large sections, our collaboration has progressed to remain relevant and effective for students.

- Hot spots for research: EDU 280. Looking for opportunities for collaboration in student learning, our education liaison partnered with College of Education faculty to identify areas in their curriculum where information literacy skills could be incorporated. Valuing Cultural Diversity, a required course for undergraduate teaching majors that already incorporates a research-based writing project, was identified as a logical entrée for establishing information literacy competencies in the major. Our education liaison and instructional designer developed scaffolded assignments integrated into the overall project to foster investigative and critical thinking skills in a multicultural context.

Liaisons are also working with graduate students to benefit the educational experience for undergraduates. A summer 2009 project paired graduate students with their subject liaison librarians to develop ways to introduce students to the library resources essential for their research. Two history students worked with our humanities liaison to survey faculty and students. They created online learning modules that described a historical event and directed students to learn more by examining newspaper articles, oral histories, and census data from the Libraries’ collections. A chemistry student worked with our science liaison librarian on a similar project focused on investigation tasks related to the chemistry department curriculum. The Libraries created a win-win situation by providing a summer extension to the graduate assistants’ fellowships and offering them the opportunity to work on meaningful projects alongside library faculty. Hundreds of students each semester, history majors and non-majors, are engaged in the innovative assignments they created. These fellowships have promoted substantial goodwill amongst the college deans, who are struggling with ways to extend assistantships for their best graduate students. They allow the Libraries to demonstrate support for the education of our graduate students as teachers and are a wonderful example of how departments collaborate with the Libraries to promote both graduate education and undergraduate research.
Discovery as a Gateway to Student Learning

Once thought to be substantially the responsibility of the Libraries’ Technical Services Division, we have moved the concept of discovery from being owned by pockets of staff to being owned by the entire organization. This has happened intentionally over the last two years in the following ways:

- **A “Summit on Discovery”:** In early 2009, 60 library staff members spent a half-day together focused on more fully understanding the discovery experience of UNLV Libraries users. We showed participants end-user usability testing footage of various users searching for information. We then facilitated a productive brainstorming session on initiatives we could undertake to improve the discovery experience of our users.

- **A Library-wide Discovery Mini-Conference:** We invited all library staff members to submit a poster session or other visual display on various themes related to discovery of information. We asked potential participants to consider the question, “What are your ideas for ways to improve how users find library resources?” Ultimately, we had 17 distinct presentations involving 24 staff presenters at this Mini-Conference.

- **Strategic Plan Action Item Generation:** We gave all library staff members the opportunity to submit action items for the strategic plan direction “Improve discoverability of physical and electronic resources in empowering users to be self sufficient; work toward an interface and system architecture that incorporates our resources, internal and external, and allows the user to access them from their preferred starting point.”

- **Discovery Task Force:** This task force, created as an action item in the our strategic plan, has done in-depth research to recommend a discovery solution for the Libraries. The outcome of this task force has already made an impact on the library community beyond UNLV through presentations to regional and national audiences and promises even broader exposure through a book currently in progress.

### Discovery Mini-Conference

Twenty-four library staff members presented at our mini-conference that was open to all library staff and others in the community to attend. Themes included:

- single search interface (federated searching, harvester-type platform, etc.)
- open source vs. vendor infrastructure
- information-seeking behavior of different users
- social networking and web 2.0 features as related to discovery
- describing primary sources and other unique materials for discovery
- opening the library catalog for different record types and materials

Presentations included environmental scans, visual representations of what improvement or success would look like, and positions on specific approaches. From these presentations, we have implemented several ideas, including our mobile website, new signage in the book stacks, and a variety of social media options for discovering information. The “Discovery Issue” (December 2009/28:4) of Information Technology and Libraries was completely devoted to documenting the UNLV Libraries’ organizational process and highlighting several of the projects presented at the mini-conference.
Physical and Virtual Learning Environments

The Ultimate Student Success Center
As the national and local conversation focuses on student success and the need to build “academic support structures” to help students persist in their academic careers, the Libraries have hooked onto the theme by describing what we have always been: in this new language, we ARE “the ultimate student success center.” As we design services to support academic success for today’s demographic of student, the Libraries as physical and virtual “places” remains as important as ever.

- We provide students one-stop academic support services in the Libraries and are the only campus location open and staffed with extended hours of operation. For example, through a collaboration with the Academic Success Center, Lied Library hosts all drop-in tutoring sessions for the campus, with 3039 sessions held so far during the Fall 2010 semester alone.

- We provide a multimedia production lab where students receive both access to and instruction in the use of information technologies. This facility also offers opportunities for furthering faculty partnerships with liaison librarians to create new approaches to assignments and classroom projects.

- Although our main Lied Library is just coming up on its 10th birthday, we are constantly reconfiguring our spaces to accommodate the need for student group study and in response to our user assessments. We provide movable furniture, white boards, and media-equipped group study rooms throughout our library locations so that students can extend their learning experience from the classroom to the library.

- Students depend upon the computer access we provide in the Libraries as well as personal assistance on how to effectively use library resources. As shown by our use statistics, users initiating web sessions originating within the Libraries are outnumbering those using our resources from offsite by 3:1. If one considers adding other in-house transactions such as our massive numbers of facility visits and printing transactions, face-to-face reference interactions, and numbers of students taught in course-integrated information literacy instruction sessions, the difference is astounding—over ten times the number of in-house contacts as offsite or remote ones.

- Exiting students consistently rate the Libraries at the top of their experience as a UNLV student and strongly agree on the Senior Exit Survey that they have made progress toward reaching those educational goals that are highly correlated with information literacy skills.

Student retention, graduation rates, and time-to-degree are all serious national problems plaguing post-secondary education. As our campus creates more structures designed to help students succeed, we play a crucial role in their success.
We also strive to continuously improve our virtual spaces. In our state-of-the-art usability testing lab, usability tests are run with both graduate and undergraduate students to determine the ease of finding commonly needed information. A recently redesigned website addresses some of the problems that have been uncovered by the testing, such as finding journal articles and locating frequently accessed items such as the Libraries’ hours of operation. Changes to http://www.library.unlv.edu/ included:

- Larger page size for easier readability
- Redesign and enhancement of first-level pages for more obvious navigation
- Changes to the tabbed search boxes to reduce confusion:
  - More noticeable Site Search tabbed box
  - Addition of a Media/Video search tab
  - Journals, Articles, and Databases combined into a single tab
- Enhancement of ad space and ad rotation to draw attention to library services and events

Community Engagement

Using our Regional Focus to Engage the Community

As the only research library in southern Nevada, and one of only two in the state, it is our responsibility to document the history, culture, and physical environment of the city of Las Vegas, the Southern Nevada region, the gaming and entertainment industry, and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Our Special Collections include unique, rare, and specialized materials that document all aspects of life and community and, in the process, we nurture pride in community for all those residents who came here to build a city and an industry in the desert. In order to share this information, we have created a web-based digital library to be discovered and used by anyone around the world—from schoolchildren to scholars.

“...In my view, a fine library is a cultural anchor for a city. This is especially needed for a young city such as Las Vegas. As the heart of a university, the library is perhaps the only rallying point for a very diverse community. As such, the library and the city have the reciprocal responsibility to support each other.”

—David Emerson, Emeritus Dean of Science & Member, Libraries Advisory Board
Librarians with 21st-century expertise in digital library creation partner with library professionals in web design and usability to create digital projects. These digital library “publications” enhance our capacity to share the unique and specialized collections that document this region’s history. Three years of successful external funding has allowed us to build an extensive infrastructure for our digital projects, and to create the following major projects:

- The Nevada Test Site Oral History Project includes almost 200 oral histories collected from interviews with a wide range of people associated with the testing. Their stories provide insights into the questions and themes related to U.S. Cold War nuclear weapons programs. Librarians used this significant collection to create a one-of-kind digital library, making the full range of perspectives on this critical aspect of our history available for the first time worldwide. The project is the recipient of the 2010 National Council on Public History’s Outstanding Public History Project Award, which recognizes excellence in projects that contribute to a broader public reflection and appreciation of the past or that serves as a model of professional public history practice.

- Southern Nevada: The Boomtown Years 1900–1925 is the story of Southern Nevada’s mining boom and bust, the coming of the railroad, and the unlikely survival of the last Nevada boomtown—Las Vegas. The educational goal of the project is to make these digitized resources easily accessible and academically relevant to a K-16 audience. The project team developed a section on the site for teachers, including information about using primary sources in the classroom as well as various standards-based activities using artifacts from the Boomtown collection.

- Our most recent digital collection, Menus: The Art of Dining, documents 1500 menus from the largest and most significant menu collection in the United States. We began collecting (and sometimes purchasing) menus in 1969 to support the curriculum of the “new” hotel college. Now, more than 40 years later, faculty use the digitized collection in courses like Food Service Operations Fundamentals.

These three grant-funded projects supplement other, self-funded projects: Showgirls; Welcome Home Howard [Hughes]; Las Vegas and Water in the West, and Southern Nevada: History in Maps.

User-Focused Innovation

When Cheryl Walters, head of digital initiatives at Utah State University, saw Southern Nevada: The Boomtown Years 1900–1925, she wrote, “This is such a beautiful, rich digital collection, loaded with things that make it useful for teachers and students.” It is dmBridge that enables the Libraries to provide the custom, optimized user experience that Cheryl references. dmBridge is custom-designed software infrastructure for CONTENTdm® developed by an application developer in the Library Technology Division. Transparent to the online visitor, dmBridge provides an improved web interface with social, community-building features such as tagging, commenting, and RSS capability to automatically alert interested visitors when the collection grows. In addition, a sister application, dmMonocle, was developed by the Libraries’ web and multimedia designer. This application further enhances the digital experience by providing an improved image viewer, allowing quick and easy pans and zooms of the high-resolution digital images. Their open source release to the broader library community earlier this year have resulted in over 150 requests for information thus far.
Two very special centers augment the collection and research activities of our Special Collections: the Oral History Research Center (OHRC) and the Center for Gaming Research. The OHRC conducts and collects interviews of people able to provide firsthand observations on a variety of historical topics about Las Vegas and Southern Nevada. We have collected over 300 interviews covering four major areas:

- the Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project (coincided with the Centennial and includes interviews of early Las Vegas residents)
- UNLV @ Fifty (documenting the earliest years of UNLV)
- All That Jazz (Las Vegas musicians of the 40's and 50's and 60's)
- Heart to Heart (history of early health care in Las Vegas)

We also have several smaller projects, including: Katrina (stories of people who migrated to Las Vegas after Hurricane Katrina); History of the Civil Rights Movement in Las Vegas; the History of the NAACP in Las Vegas; the Las Vegas Gay community; and various social and service groups such as the local Rotary, Kiwanis, and Junior League chapters. We also collect interviews from people in the gaming and entertainment industries, ranging from executives to showgirls, and we work in the community to help groups collect their own oral histories.

The Gaming Research Center provides support for scholarly inquiry into all aspects of gambling, including the business of gaming, its economic and social impacts and its historical and cultural manifestations. We actively collect materials from the industries located in Las Vegas, but our scope is broad, ranging from an extensive rare book collection on card playing and gambling to our architecture collections for casinos—with a bit of everything in between. Our Director publishes extensively in the gaming industry and in the media and produces reports through an Occasional Papers series initiated in 2010.

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**Fellowships Support Scholarship**

In the 2007–08 academic year, the Center for Gaming Research initiated a ground-breaking new program, the Gaming Research Fellows. Every year, four to five fellows, selected by a committee of library and academic faculty after a rigorous application process, each spend a month in residency at the Libraries Special Collections, where they conduct a variety of research projects using our unique collections. “The program was designed to raise the profile of University Libraries’ unique holdings in gaming and Las Vegas history,” says our Dean of Libraries. “By attracting both respected veteran researchers and future scholars, the fellowships simultaneously underscore the importance of our collections and spur new scholarship in our areas of concentration.” The fellows have represented several disciplines, from mathematics to history, and include both graduate students and established scholars from schools as diverse as Temple University, Utah State University, and the University of Arizona. Each Gaming Research Fellow gives a public lecture on his or her research as part of the project.
Engaging the Business Community

As UNLV seeks to educate the broader Nevada community about the importance of a research university as an engine for economic diversification and stimulation, the Libraries have hooked onto this theme by structuring an outreach program to engage the Las Vegas business community. We take the opportunity to promote our rich, electronic collections, and our significant expertise for business leaders. The Libraries Advisory Board has chosen this outreach effort as one of its activities for 2010. The Dean of Libraries has presented at meetings of local business groups, promoting the Libraries, its collections, and its experts. After the initial contact, our business liaison is stepping up to offer specialized one-on-one research assistance, or to design workshops for small groups. By focusing on groups of business leaders, these presentations have had a side benefit of expanding the base of community members who know about the Libraries and the University and who have become further engaged in our work.

Exporting our Expertise

Last spring, the Libraries began promoting library resources and providing research assistance as a partner in the ExporTech program. ExporTech is designed to help manufacturing companies develop export plans to enter or expand in foreign markets to increase their sales, and ultimately, to create more jobs in Nevada. The program is administered by Nevada Industry Excellence, the Department of Commerce, and the UNLV College of Business in partnership with the Libraries. Our business liaison attended ExporTech sessions to demonstrate how library resources can be utilized for the export plans being developed by local companies. He followed up with workshops featuring more in-depth instruction for program participants and student interns and continued to meet with individual company teams for research consultations throughout the export plan development process.
On the Horizon

Several initiatives in the planning stages underscore our continued commitment to and enthusiasm for faculty support, student learning, and curricular partnerships.

Summer Institute to Address Milestone Courses
Building upon the success of the Faculty Institute for Research-Based Learning in High Impact Courses, the next Institute in the works is focused on “milestone” or 3rd-year courses. Just as the first Institute targeted specific lower-division courses with high impact, this Institute will target specific courses across the majors that are likely places in the curriculum for library collaboration and embedding of the new undergraduate learning outcomes.

Faculty Collaboratory
Through a collaboration with the Office of Information Technology, Distance Education, and the Libraries, we are preparing to open the “Faculty Collaboratory” in the main Lied Library. This new service will provide faculty and other instructors drop-in and by-appointment help with their instructional technology needs. Staff from all three areas are in the process of forming a cohort, learning from one other, cross training, and designing the space. By leveraging our individual expertise and resources, we can provide a seamless service for instructors and course support from a holistic perspective.

Student Leadership Group and Library Ambassadors
Library staff who supervise student employees, the Student Leadership Group, are developing a new program designed to add value to the traditional student employee experience. Expanding upon our success with the small cohort of Mason Undergraduate Peer Research Coaches, we will be extracting some of the best educational opportunities for developing social and career skills, and making them available to all of our 90 student employees. On-the-job training will be expanded to include baseline skills in library research as well. We will intentionally cultivate our student employees as “student ambassadors,” helping them to develop as individuals, as employees, and as students.

Student-Focused Renovations
In line with our efforts to create a physical space that responds to ever-changing educational needs, a new and improved physical space for graduate students is under development. Designed in consultation with the Graduate College and the Graduate and Professional Student Association, this new space will include a seminar area for library faculty to work with graduate students one-on-one and in small groups.

In Conclusion
The UNLV Libraries have capitalized on the best of our city and region, strategically supporting our institution’s mission while at the same time influencing the culture of the University. We have created a strong educational presence that is demonstrated through a rich portfolio of innovative partnerships and initiatives. We have developed an internal framework, where staff focus all that they do on student learning and the Libraries’ users. We have not only changed others’ view of the Libraries, we have changed our own perspective on ourselves. While once beloved simply for the customer service we provide, we are now known for our expertise and substantial contributions to the teaching and learning endeavor at UNLV.

“The high praise for the library in our recent accreditation report is well deserved and serves as a model for how student centered and service oriented values have made our library an integral part of student learning on our campus.”

–Neal Smatresk, President, UNLV