

The seal of Amherst College is a circular emblem. It features a central sunburst with a sun in the middle, radiating lines, and an open book below it. The Latin motto "SIGILLUM COLLEGIUM AMHERSTENSEM MASSACHUSETTENSIS" is inscribed around the perimeter, and "TERRAS IRRADIENT" is written across the center. The seal is rendered in a light purple color.

AMHERST
COLLEGE
LIBRARY

Application for

ACRL Excellence in Academic Libraries Award

Submitted by

The Staff of the Amherst College Library



1965

1968

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The Amherst College Library is idealistic and iconoclastic.

We serve Amherst College, an institution with a Utopian motto—"Let them enlighten the lands"—and the Library embraces this motto with abandon.

As colleagues we share strong beliefs on which we work to act with conviction, sometimes at a (willing) price. We believe, for example, that...

... for all their historic accomplishments, academic libraries fail students when students cannot conduct good research.

We are teaching the craft of research.

... the current model of scholarly communication and academic publishing is irreparably broken.

We are building a new model.

... information should be free.

We are freeing it.

To this end we have built new departments, created new positions, devised new models of teaching, strengthened relationships with faculty, encouraged staff to redesign their roles, raised money, adopted difficult principles, consulted and argued with lawyers, evangelized around the country, broken down departmental barriers, and engaged in outreach within and beyond the walls of the Library.

Staff throughout the Library made these changes by engaging in serious, cross-departmental collaboration and communication, by demonstrating unusual flexibility and an eagerness to restructure workflows, and by maintaining at all times the broadest possible view of library service.

Our work coalesced in the last four years around three broad initiatives:

Teaching students to conduct good research.

We created a new department of Research & Instruction, hiring five new librarians who function primarily as teachers. Their work with faculty, students, classes, and colleagues across campus has transformed undergraduate research at Amherst.

Promoting and enabling universal access to information.

Our library, serving a small college of 1,800 students in rural Massachusetts, is committed to the ideal of a universal library, a web of information available to everyone, everywhere, regardless of means. We've adopted principles consistent with this ideal—principles that determine what we buy, what we license, and how we allocate our budgets. We've established new departments to build digital collections and programs that disseminate what we own with as few restrictions as possible.

Creating a new model of academic publishing.

In 2014 we launched the Amherst College Press under the auspices of the Library. This Press is the first academic, entirely open-access press in the United States to focus on monographs.



Values & Beliefs. The Amherst Library, we contend, succeeds in large part to the extent that Amherst students learn to do good research.

Because Amherst describes itself as a “research college” and because its mission insists that “Amherst undergraduates assume substantial responsibility for undertaking inquiry and for shaping their education within and beyond the curriculum,” the Library believes that everything it does—everything it owns, catalogs, and creates—has meaning only if students graduate as skilled researchers.

In other words, we insist on measuring the Library’s success in part by asking whether Amherst graduates can pose researchable questions; decide what constitutes good information; find that information; evaluate, jettison, and synthesize what they find; draw conclusions from this process; and, ultimately, produce new theses and arguments and present them in compelling writing, speech, and other media.

Actions. Three years ago the Library created a new department of Research & Instruction by repurposing five positions in what had been the Reference Department. Relying on existing salary lines, we hired five new librarians who think of themselves primarily as teachers, and who have become happily overwhelmed with requests from faculty to partner in teaching research skills. These instruction librarians spend most of their time with classes and with students in supplemental sessions and individual research appointments. The results of this are measurable and significant. In each of the past four years, librarians, invited by faculty, worked with:

- 97 classes in 2010-2011
- 145 classes in 2011-2012
- 196 classes in 2012-2013
- 221 classes in 2013-2014

Our Community. While Amherst boasts a long tradition of undergraduate research—almost half of all seniors complete honors theses—Amherst’s open curriculum, and an institutional culture eschewing standardization, necessitate an approach to research instruction different from that at many institutions. The Amherst curriculum mandates only one course, a First-Year Seminar; other than requirements for a major, it imposes no distribution or core requirements. Faculty and departments enjoy greater autonomy in creating courses than do peers at institutions with more requirements.

The open curriculum means that most courses include a mix of all enrolled classes—first-year students, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Most include students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. We take pride in Amherst’s commitment to diversity, including need-blind admissions and no-loan financial aid: 26 percent of students entering in fall 2014 hail from low-income families, 61 percent receive scholarship or grant aid, and 45 percent identify as American students



Sara Smith, Research and Instruction librarian, teaching a course with Professor Nicola Courtright

of color. Another 10 percent are non-U.S. citizens, and roughly 60 percent of transfer students arrive from community colleges. Such diversity translates to a wide range of research experience and its attendant norms.

Bringing students from incredibly disparate educational backgrounds to a campus without a standard information-literacy component might seem problematic. But it works given our commitment to teaching process as opposed to product, and our belief in centering instruction around student inquiry rather than familiarity with particular tools or sources. We conducted a study of student research skills in the fall of 2011 with eight sections of First Year Seminars; the study confirmed that students are comfortable with basic search mechanics—citation identification, for example—a finding that allows us to focus on conceptual skills, the process of research rather than the mechanics of research.

Our focus on process allows Research & Instruction librarians to engage productively the diverse curriculum and student body while evangelizing in ways that ring true with faculty. In hiring new Research & Instruction librarians, we sought first and foremost candidates with exemplary research skills who think of themselves (and whom faculty also regard) as teachers, who see no disparity between teaching and service. They work with faculty to teach what our associate dean of faculty terms a “research orientation.” They teach students to be problem-solvers, creative, and fluent in (though not bound by) technology; to ask good questions; chart nonlinear, iterative research processes; and build working relationships with faculty and peers across campus.

“This past term [our librarian] worked closely with many of my students... Their topics for their research papers were not closely conceived and they did not know how to conduct useful literature searches. At the end of the term I got possibly the best set of such papers in fifty years of teaching. No credit goes to me. It all belongs to [a librarian]—for grace and tact, patience, ingenuity, both in helping students focus their questions and then find pertinent materials.”

—A professor of English



Missy Roser, director of Research and Instruction, teaching a research seminar

New Approaches. Librarians often teach collaboratively, an approach that allows them to share expertise and test interdisciplinary approaches. Two librarians, for example, teach an American Studies class incorporating census records and literary works in the study of geography. Others partner in teaching visual analysis in a history class. Librarians and archivists also teach together, working with students around primary sources and archival material. Librarians from Digital Programs work with Research & Instruction librarians on metadata analysis in a digital humanities seminar, and help students curate digital exhibits in several other seminars. These collaborations encourage everyone—students, faculty, librarians, and archivists—to think anew about

methodologies and to raise fresh questions about strategies and resources.

Such work, of course, requires good communication, not only between librarians and faculty members, but also with staff in Acquisitions, Access Services, and Technical Services, who select, purchase, and license new material to support research. These professionals rightly pride themselves on prompt turnaround times and clear workflows. Our Collection Development Committee instituted data-driven measures to evaluate new resources at a time when a new generation of scholars is arriving to replace a wave of retiring faculty. Drawing on curriculum-mapping work begun by Research & Instruction librarians, Acquisitions staff now use a rubric to assess materials relevance to student learning, faculty research, and the unique strengths of the collection.



A poster session presenting faculty/librarian/student research collaborations.

“[The librarians] are outstanding. Altogether they have shaped a department that not only draws students readily, but one that has contributed to a notably and newly welcoming climate in the Library. My students use the Library now with a frequency and affection I have not seen in two decades.”

—A professor of English

“Thank you for your tenacity... I couldn't have completed my [sophomore year] research paper without your meticulous care and genuine interest in my research. That research inspired this thesis, and working with you in 2011 gave me the tools to be able to do so much more on my own in 2013.”

—A student thesis writer of the Class of 2013

“Thanks so much for all your help this semester. I'm not sure what our research group would do without you!”

—Mellon tutorial student

In the 2010-11 academic year, Amherst received a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to develop a series of experimental research tutorials—small-group experiences based on the research of faculty colleagues. One type of Mellon tutorial introduces sophomores to research approaches and methodologies in humanities and social-science research: how to frame a research inquiry, develop research strategies, and identify and use all available sources, whether archival, textual, electronic, human, or artifactual. A second type of tutorial, for juniors, helps students identify and pursue research topics intersecting with scholarly interests of faculty mentors and, ideally, leading to senior theses—reflecting a model of collaboration more common in the lab-based sciences. Examples include the effects of geography on public education in Cambridge, Massachusetts; botched

executions in the United States; the making and legacy of the King James Bible; the anthropology of catastrophes; and dance and cultural agency in Brazil.

Our librarians have a central role in these seminars. A librarian and/or archivist works alongside faculty members, each teaching in his or her discipline—although often on the edges of areas of deepest expertise. Librarians participate as embedded teachers—partners from the start. Their teaching at times includes elements of coaching and project management, keeping constituent pieces of work focused on larger goals, bolstering morale, and floating constantly between work with individuals, small groups, and the entire class. Librarians insist on collaboration, focusing on big-picture concepts, adapting to continually changing syllabi, offering specialized advice on individual topics, and sustaining contact with students as students assume the role of original researchers.

The innovative, risk-taking nature of the Mellon seminars allow us to expand our understanding of the theory and practice of research instruction. When and how should we talk about particular approaches, norms, mindsets, and tools? How should one teach process? How do we help students engage sources not as final answers but as pieces of an ongoing conversation? What constitutes a researchable question?

In some seminars librarians teach broad concepts one day, disciplinary knowledge another, and particular tools another. In other seminars they team-teach with colleagues in Archives & Special Collections about processing collections, or with Academic Technology's GIS specialist about mapping demographic data. Several things make this work unique. First is our librarians' extended involvement in the seminars: in addition to helping faculty at their courses' conceptual stages, librarians participate in the Mellon cohort's bimonthly planning and feedback meetings. Second are the sustained relationships with students—"Mellon scholars"—who often remain on campus for the summer to continue their research either individually or in groups. And third, the seminars offer both faculty and the library an opportunity to rethink what librarians bring to the classroom, contributing both as research mentors and disciplinary experts in their right.

In each of the past three summers, students from Mellon Seminars remained on campus and set up camp around the Research & Instruction offices and in Archives & Special Collections. Just three examples:

- Students in Professor Austin Sarat's "America's Death Penalty" seminar spent six weeks doing research with the Marshall Bloom Alternative Press Collection. They examined every issue of every publication in our 535-box collection of underground, leftist newspapers, published between 1969 and 1980, in search of stories about botched executions in the United States. They scrutinized issues of *The Black Panther* and recorded differences between its reportage on death-penalty cases and those in the mainstream press.
- Another seminar used a diary and personal papers in the archives to create an interactive, online exhibit—a project supported by archivists, the department of Digital Programs, and IT's department of Academic Technology.
- A third group worked on "American Performance Culture circa 1900," collaborating with an embedded Research & Instruction librarian (trained as an archivist) to mine the extensive and uncatalogued Samuel French Archives and Theater Collection. This work culminated in an exhibit mounted in the fall; several student digital-humanities interns then launched the next phase of the faculty project at the start of this academic year.

To support such work, Research & Instruction librarians facilitate weekly meetings throughout the





Mike Kelly, director of Archives and Special Collections, teaching a class on primary source research

summer with Mellon students, prompting them to ask questions and share experiences with peers. Librarians model how to organize, share, and store research materials and findings; how to navigate relationships with lead researchers and faculty mentors; how to establish deliverables for a project; and how to pace themselves during intense periods of work. Students report a sense of ownership in this work they've never before experienced.

Since 2009 the department of Archives & Special Collections has completely transformed itself to promote curricular research with primary sources. Just three examples among dozens:

- The department worked closely with faculty teaching two sections of the First Year Seminar “Growing Up in America.” Midway through the semester students visited the archives for an introduction to available sources—past yearbooks, student publications, and other records of college life—and then set out to describe life as a first-year student at Amherst College a hundred years ago. Faculty integrated the students’ discoveries into course readings about youth in America. We now repeat this assignment each fall, meeting with faculty early in the semester to adjust and refine the course for a new crop of students, while ensuring that no one portion of the archives suffers from overuse. (We contend that fear of overuse constitutes the highest measure of success.)
- A newly hired medievalist expressed delight to learn that the archives recently acquired a collection of original *Prince Valiant* artwork and scripts. She employed this material—along with 16th-century and later editions of Chaucer (plus various renderings of King Arthur and his knights)—in a course titled “Imagining the Past,” in which she and her students explored representations of the Middle Ages throughout history.
- This year the head of Archives & Special Collections co-taught two courses: “Archival Explorations: Becoming a Part of College History” with a professor of American Studies, and “Shakespeare and the History of Books” with a professor of English. Both courses functioned as research seminars.

As class visits to the archives increase (last year 86 classes visited the archives, representing 819 students or 45% of the student body), we have begun cross-training Research & Instruction librarians to lead archival instruction sessions on their own. More than twenty courses turned a single visit to the archives into substantial course research projects. Students have curated exhibitions on everything from the history of modernist magazines to treasures in our Wordsworth collection.

Having gained a better understanding of what students and faculty find useful in the classroom, we now build our archival and special collections around student and faculty research: we identify gaps in curricular resources and attempt to fill them. This constitutes a radical shift for Amherst, a move away from accepting whatever donors chose to contribute when cleaning out their attics. We no longer accept material merely because it is valuable; instead we make systematic efforts to build collections useful to the curriculum and important to research.

The most recent and most spectacular example of this policy in action is the acquisition of the Younghee Kim-Wait/Pablo Eisenberg Collection of Native American Literature, considered the best collection of books authored by Native Americans ever assembled by a private collector. In the Fall of 2012, Amherst hired two new Native Studies faculty, but our library held a mere handful of primary sources relevant to their teaching and research. Our near-total lack of coverage in this area made us the perfect match for this collection—1,500 volumes of Native literature ranging from relatively common, recently published books to extremely rare and unique items. Our fundraising efforts found an enthusiastic donor keen to build collections for active student use. Within weeks of the collection's arrival, staff in Technical Services began adding titles to the catalog, even as students and faculty flocked to view the material before we could catalog it.

“I am already planning a course, focused on Native American literature and intellectual traditions, which will be designed around the collection. The research possibilities are endless. I also look forward to being able to share the collection with tribal scholars from local Native nations, with our colleagues in the Five Colleges, and with a network of indigenous scholars around the world.”

—A professor of American Studies

Archives & Special Collections works assiduously to integrate its work with that of other library departments, particularly Research & Instruction. Rather than a quiet, intimidating treasure-house, the archives is now a scene of intense activity. Librarians from Technical Services, Research & Instruction, and Digital Programs participate in weekly meetings in the archives to facilitate a wide range of cross-departmental collaborations.

To further demystify archival research, we initiated the Lane Research Fellowships for Creative Artists in 2012. These fellowships encourage students in the arts to employ archival collections in their creative work. The program helps students make connections between creative practices and academic research; it also fosters closer connections between the Library and arts departments. Projects birthed by this program include a performance based on the papers of a noted practitioner of Japanese Noh theater; a series of short stories set in Massachusetts, for which the author read letters from local family papers and consulted nineteenth-century pronunciation atlases; a group of poems in Spanglish inspired by Alumni biographical files; and a dance based on images from nineteenth-century physical education manuals. We receive regular inquiries from other institutions interested in establishing similar programs in their libraries.



“The Archives in Frost Library offers exciting opportunities for students to carry out research using primary sources, and to learn first hand the challenges and joys of working with historical evidence. [The head of Archives & Special Collections] is a master at helping faculty members design learning experiences for students using archival materials.”

—A professor of Psychology

Over the past two years the departments of Archives & Special Collections and Digital Programs have worked closely to move material through our new digital production studio (see below). Curricular needs often drive the selection of materials for digitization. We respond to specific requests from students, as well as faculty needs for upcoming courses. For instance, we added a 500-page manuscript memoir to [Amherst College Digital Collections](#)

[Collections](#)—a work authored by an Amherst alumnus who spent forty years as a missionary in Turkey between 1866 and 1906—specifically in support of a course taught by an anthropology professor specializing in the history of that region.

We frequently integrate rare books and manuscripts into traditional library-instruction sessions. Students conducting research with digitized Revolutionary War-era manuscripts, for example, obtain a richer understanding of that digital content when they can also consult physical manuscripts and newspapers from the same era.

Curricular-based research initiatives have identified a need not only for new pedagogical practices in the Library but also for closer work with faculty partners in the Writing Center and Academic Technology. Our collaborations with the Amherst Writing Center—which offers students appointments and workshops with professional writing instructors—have exploded these last few years. Librarians and writing instructors now offer joint sessions on planning and managing thesis research. We’ve launched a series of “coffee hours” for thesis writers, centered on rotating topics and guest hosts. We also welcome writing associates into the Library during Interterm for writing boot camps and drop-in hours. In 2013 the Library and the Writing Center developed a series of questions to assess awareness and satisfaction with services supporting independent research. Amherst’s Office of Institutional Research added these questions to a survey sent to all enrolled students, and the responses have already guided space planning in the Library (see below). They also prompted us to revamp offerings targeted to seniors. We’ve cultivated relationships with academic technologists by offering a joint series of workshops for students who remain on campus over the summer to do research. And we’re working together on mobile technologies in coursework and a new, active-learning, instructional space in the Merrill Science Library to complement a hands-on instruction classroom we created two years ago in the main library.

These partnerships led to the college’s first-ever undergraduate research and creative-work showcase in 2013: Amherst Explorations, a half day of presentations, posters, chamber music, and art, spearheaded by the Library and the Center for Community Engagement in cooperation with the Writing Center and Academic Technology. The showcase offered students a high-profile opportunity to present their research to the larger college community. It introduced first-year students to opportunities for research at Amherst; gave juniors a close look at thesis work near completion; challenged students in the throes of research to synthesize their work and communicate its importance to a broader audience; and captured for the first time a full range of student research underway during a given year. We repeated the event successfully in 2014, with an additional

hour of programming, more participation, and the inclusion of new panels on work in the Digital Humanities and new media. It also led to a showcase this September in the Reading Room where students presented work in progress from the summer, and the awarding prizes for poster design and communication of findings after voting by a capacity crowd.

AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

While feedback solicited from students and faculty convinces us we're on the right track, we remain troubled by the lack of efforts in our profession to measure (a) what and how we teach affects what students do and how they do it, and (b) the quality of the research they produce. So we embarked on a project to do just that.

In the spring of 2013, we and colleagues at Swarthmore College obtained a grant to host librarians and faculty from five small liberal-arts colleges for a conference on assessing undergraduate research. Roughly fifty colleagues spent two days in conversation about how faculty understand "research," how students do research, how students learn to do research, and how we evaluate that research.

Already, ideas generated from this gathering have yielded new faculty/librarian partnerships and new approaches to teaching research skills. Conference conversations about the importance of the iterative aspects of research have led to shifting emphases in research instruction. And discussions about scaffolding assignments to provide students with feedback as they prepare for large research papers have led librarians and faculty to revamp assignments, prompts, and even whole sections of research-methods courses.

Representatives from three institutions—Amherst, Haverford, and Swarthmore—resolved to go further: to track a cohort of undergraduates at three institutions over a four-year career. The goal is twofold: to determine how and from whom students learn to do research, and then to correlate the success of students' research with the processes and strategies they use. We thus seek to determine whether students can query the "literature" in their disciplines, read closely and critically, sort through multiple arguments, and weigh evidence found—all in a way that informs their research questions and yields well-reasoned and original arguments—while identifying the factors and experiences that contribute to the success or failure of that work. An initial grant application for this project failed; we're about to create a second.

CREATING SPACE FOR RESEARCH

Research and learning about research occur as much through discussion and debate as through contemplative study. But those who designed and built our main library in 1963 created a building to accommodate individual, solitary study of a particularly ascetic and hermetic sort. They did not anticipate this exceptionally social generation of students—students who work collaboratively and cooperatively, whose professors assign group projects, and who, even when working alone, prefer to work alone in the presence of others.

Our students value—and clamor—for group space: places to see and be seen, retire with friends, prepare for exams, work on problem sets, tackle research assignments, and create multimedia presentations. They ask for flexible, open spaces, which can be reconfigured for gatherings of different types and sizes. Students tell us that Amherst College, an intensely residential college, has no "town center," no assembly point, no community-wide gathering place, no real student union.

We thus began to re-imagine the Library as the college's village common, a gathering place that serves social needs and wedges those needs to intellectual pursuits. The library, we believe, should be the most inviting and welcoming place on campus; the "third space" for communal life that

Robert Putnam advocates in *Bowling Alone*; a place for conversational inquiry, argumentation, commiseration, and bull sessions. A modern-day version of the 19th-century French salon: a bohemian cafe, *sans la prétention et les cigarettes*.

Although we expect in the next five to ten years to build a new library better suited to this vision, we concluded we could not wait to address pressing demands for a learning environment so different from the one we inherited. So we placed tablets on easels throughout the Library and asked students how they'd like spaces to change. We transcribed the results, categorized them, and got to work.

We began by removing stacks on two floors—a process made possible by our bargain-basement purchase of a decommissioned Strategic Air Command bunker on the outskirts of town, built into the side of a nearby mountain, as a site for rarely used print material. We removed individual study cubicles in front of windows and replaced them with communal tables. We furnished newly open areas with rolling whiteboards. We piloted a quiet floor and, after receiving positive feedback, designated it permanently as a silent zone apart from social zones. Students flock to all these areas. Each morning we find the boards full of chemical formulas, math problems, outlines of arguments, and cryptic neologisms.



Whiteboards create impromptu environments for study groups.

We proposed a salon centered around a cafe and found an alumnus to fund it. Unlike many academic libraries, we did not place our cafe in the entryway; instead, we located it beyond the reference and circulation desk, intentionally routing cafe traffic past service points. The result is a marked increase in conversations between reference librarians and faculty, students, and staff. We now think of the reference desk, re-imagined as a shared-service desk, as Conversation Central:

“The Frost Library is truly the academic hub of our campus and a model of what academic libraries can and should be. It is a magnet for intellectual engagement and provides a welcoming space for research, exploration, and debate. Moreover, the staff do not just serve the community. They are integral to it. They are valued educators and colleagues, and have proven to be indispensable to my own teaching and research.”

—Associate Dean of the Faculty

students drop by to ask questions or, increasingly, pause simply because a friendly face appears in their line of transit. Faculty meet with both librarians and students in the cafe to discuss courses, research projects, epistemology, and matters of campus concern.

Believing that research has an important public component, we also resolved to frame the Library as a place of public research, where we celebrate not only the pursuit of



Conversation in the Frost Cafe

research but also its fruits, including the milestones that precede the harvesting of those fruits. In other words, we're reframing scholarship in part as a public endeavor.

The rapid transition of journal publishing from print to electronic formats allowed us to transform the once overbearing periodical reading room into a place for public scholarship. We removed floor-to-ceiling shelves, installed projection equipment, and installed tables and chairs on casters, thus allowing us to turn the room in a matter of minutes into what has become the favorite campus venue for scholarly events. In this space we

now host talks about research in progress, book parties, visiting lecturers, and panel discussions. We host another five to eight sessions each year around Amherst's "Copeland Colloquium," which brings visiting scholars to campus for research on an annual theme: "The Future of the Humanities in the Age of Technics," "Violent States," "Art and Identity in the Global Community," "Catastrophe," etc. We invite translators to talk about the art and science of translation, ethnomusicologists to talk about YouTube videos, and jazz musicians to talk about improvisation. It is a space that flows from academic study to shared and open knowledge with ease.

The library also agreed to house a new Humanities Center, a "space for incubation of new work in the humanities and for reflective study." The goals of the center—fostering the next generation of humanities scholars in the liberal arts; nourishing innovating scholarship; promoting experimentation; supporting collaboration among humanists, artists, social scientists, and scientists—is, in our mind, one means of fully expressing the Library's mission to "foster inquiry, discovery, and creation."

We also believe the physical library should promote aesthetic values. Students and faculty should be surrounded by art when studying, reading, and conversing. We agree with our colleagues in the museum that the appreciation of art is a key characteristic of a liberally and well-educated student, and the Library should be full to bursting with art; when students respire in study areas, they should breathe in the arts of the liberal arts. We created permanent and ad-hoc gallery spaces, which can barely keep up with demand from student artists, traveling exhibitions, and work by alumni.

"Thank you so much for all of your help and support over the course of my time here.... I can't tell you how much I appreciated your quick responses, helpful information, and just seeing you in the Library."

—Student thesis writer

Academic libraries in general and college libraries in particular constantly face the temptation to turn inward, to establish priorities only in reference to the immediate and short-term needs of their own students and faculty.

At Amherst, we believe a short-term, inwardly directed focus not only ignores the needs of a global citizenry; it also undermines the long-term needs of the members of our own community. Too often academic libraries fail to consider how the pressing needs of their discrete communities relate to the long-term needs of scholarship unconstrained by geography.

We ignore other communities at our own peril. The more difficulty people outside our institutions encounter in seeking access to knowledge—i.e., the more the global ecosystem of scholarly communication contracts—the more our own students and faculty suffer. Globalization does not allow us to live in isolation. We find ourselves impoverished—always indirectly, and sometimes directly—when information fails to flow freely. When our natural colleagues—people anywhere seeking access to ideas, regardless of place, income, or education—cannot obtain the facts, figures, thoughts, ideas, and publications they need, then in a very real sense we have not fulfilled our mission.

Amherst's motto, *Terras Irradiant*, makes plain to us our mandate to serve our students, staff, faculty, and citizens of the world as an interdependent, global community. Said differently, the Amherst College Library believes that information is a public good, an essential component of healthy democracies, a necessary precursor to emerging democracies, and an underutilized, even squandered resource if tightly held and less than universally available.

We fully recognize the difficult implications of taking this statement seriously. It places squarely upon us the responsibility to do more than kvetch, complain, carp, and wring our hands about systemic impediments to this vision. We have sought to answer this responsibility in three specific ways.

I. Digital Programs

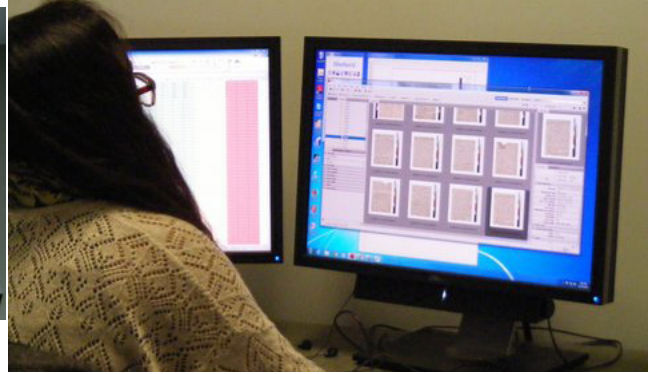
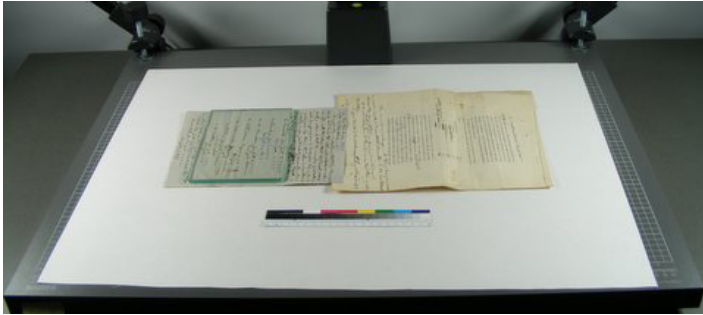
Values & Beliefs. We believe:

- Amherst College, and its library, has an obligation to make its unique collections, acquisitions, and subscriptions available to the widest possible audience, regardless of that audience's location, ability to travel, or affluence.
- The library must position itself as an altruistic academic citizen, committed to preserving its collections for others, making those collections accessible to all, driven by the principle that information should be free.
- Amherst's self-designation as a "research college" means it should be elite in its holdings yet egalitarian in its commitments to all.

These values, we contend, find concrete expression only by digitizing our collections—by converting them to formats that can be discovered by and shared with the roughly 3.1 billion people now with internet access.

Actions. We have lived out this set of ideas in two ways:

Creating a New Department. Seeking no new positions, we created a three-person department of Digital Programs by reallocating funds, reconfiguring open positions, and finding current staff willing to assume new responsibilities. The retirement of the head of our Visual Resource Center provided an opportunity to reconfigure that role in providing leadership for Digital Programs.



Digital programs have unleashed our archives and catalyzed research projects.

Another opening in the VRC allowed us to create a position for a Digital Projects Librarian. And the remaining member of the Visual Resources Center worked with us to reconfigure her responsibilities in support of our new focus.

The charge of Digital Programs is to produce, gather, organize, disseminate, and preserve digital materials essential to the curriculum, unique to the college, and of use to the larger global community. The department works closely with IT to design and implement systems for managing and preserving digital assets. It consults and creates programs for gathering digital collections, advancing digital scholarship, and enabling digital publishing.

Adopting a Holistic Approach. In its first two years of existence—before the department was fully staffed—Digital Programs created a digitization studio, collaborated with Technical Services to establish a metadata program, and worked with Information Technology to create a digital repository to support scholarly and administrative output from across the college—all while continuing to support faculty who teach with images.

The result of this cross-campus effort is [Amherst College Digital Collections \(ACDC\)](#), a system designed from scratch to serve as a single solution to digital asset management, preservation, and delivery for multiple types of digital content (text, images, audio, video, data sets, etc.) from multiple cultural, academic, and administrative departments across the college. To achieve this vision we declined to settle for an out-of-the-box system capable of serving only one or two stakeholders; instead, we began building with [Hydra](#) and [Fedora](#)—open-source tools that require significant development but provide a framework for acquiring, storing, preserving, and disseminating material of all types.

In the first year of operations, the department digitized over 6,500 pages of manuscripts and books from Archives & Special Collections. It worked with Technical Services to create 1,500 metadata records, and successfully converted and migrated over 75,000 digital objects to a new digital asset management system. By 2014 (only the third year of operation), Digital Programs more than quadrupled its annual digitization output, creating over 27,700 images representing nearly 4,000 distinct archival objects. Interdepartmental collaboration and a commitment to mentoring the next generation of librarians (see below) makes this possible. With this infrastructure now in place Digital Programs has expanded its scope, partnering with faculty to bring digital methodologies into their classrooms and into their research, while also leading a number of digital preservation projects.

Exceptionally close relations between Digital Programs and Technical Services illustrate what is possible through partnerships built on respect, trust, shared goals, and a common refusal to think about turf, credit, or autonomy. From the beginning, both departments recognized that new metadata schemes and workflows represent the inevitable and ongoing evolution of cataloging.

They determined that traditional cataloging staff should lead metadata efforts and enroll in classes and workshops on DACS, MODS, XML, and XSLT. A cataloging librarian with expertise in non-MARC formats and an interest in expanding her horizons worked closely with the head of Digital Programs to develop metadata standards, guidelines, and workflows for the burgeoning efforts. This relationship continues: the Cataloging section of Technical Services now creates metadata for all of our unique digital content.

The departments of Digital Programs and Archives & Special Collections also work hand in glove. An early project—mounting digitized versions of our Emily Dickinson papers and creating detailed metadata for each of the 850 pieces in the collection—received good press in [Slate](#), [Bon Appétit](#), and the Poetry Foundation's [Poetry News](#). Other archival collections added to [Amherst College Digital Collections](#) include the papers of Edward Hitchcock, the third president of Amherst College; more than 150 years of the *Olio*, the Amherst College yearbook; our collection of Medieval Manuscripts; the entirety of the Lord Jeffrey Amherst and French and Indian War collections (invaluable history

“I cannot say enough about how much I love the Library and its amazing staff! I have never before experienced such outstanding collaboration between faculty and librarians. My own teaching and my vision of what collaborative teaching can be has flourished through working with [librarians]. My seminars last year began with seed ideas about bringing students into the archives. Now I am designing courses that revolve around the archives, the expanding collections, and co-teaching opportunities.... If my students need assistance with an assignment, based on collaboration between faculty and librarians, they receive it. If they need a book for thesis research, the Library acquires it. I could not imagine a better collaborative research and teaching relationship. It makes me grateful to be here.”

—A professor of English and American Studies

and context for the campus-wide debate over changing the controversial “Lord Jeff” mascot; and public domain books in the Kim-Wait/Eisenberg Collection of Native American Literature. Other priorities derive from curricular needs (as previously discussed), faculty and researcher requests, and the needs of a global, scholarly community.

As a result of our experience building these tools, Amherst is now recognized as a leader in the Hydra/Fedora community. ACDC offers unique tools for discovery and access, features for building personal collections and exporting groups of images into presentations, and self-ingest capabilities to support Amherst’s open-access resolution (see below). ACDC will soon contain data about collections from the Beneski Museum of Natural History, digital media created by

public affairs, and all digital material requiring long-term preservation. The flexibility of Hydra/Fedora allows us to create a range of digital preservation services to support digital publishing for the Amherst College Press (see below), and to provide researchers with tools to analyze and interact with digital collections through transcription, mapping, and data visualization.

To aid these efforts while educating the next generation of metadata and digital librarians, we raised funds through the Friends of the Amherst College Library to support paid internships for students from the nearby Simmons College Graduate School of Library and Information Science. These interns, originally working under the direction of our head of Digital Programs, established standards-based workflows for digitization, established procedures for implementing and tracking

projects, and developed instructional and promotional content for our digital collections website. Metadata interns and metadata residents work under the guidance of our metadata management librarian to create original records for archival materials in MODS, to develop XSLT stylesheets, to support metadata conversion and repurposing, to write internal guidelines, and to create custom metadata profiles for specific projects.

We pride ourselves on guiding interns into the profession. We integrate them into the full life of the Library: they attend all-hands meetings and relevant department and project meetings, participate in strategic planning; and help to interview job candidates. We provide funds enabling them to attend conferences and workshops. Over the course of their work with us we discuss their courses and career aspirations; provide input on their CVs, cover letters, and job talks; and proudly (and zealously) help them land jobs. The majority of our interns have secured positions within six months of graduation.

In the summer of 2014, we expanded our internship program to include three full-time Digital Scholarship summer internships for Amherst undergraduates. This summer program educates students about Digital Scholarship and provides them hands-on opportunities to create their own digital projects centered around collections in the Amherst College Archives. Students spend a summer with staff throughout the Library in workshops, exploring open-source tools, conducting research on best practices, and planning complex projects.

Staff in Digital Programs also work closely with Research & Instruction librarians, archivists, and academic technologists to integrate digital methodologies into numerous courses. For example, they partnered with IT in a Mellon seminar on the U.S. occupation of Germany, in which students created an interactive, touchscreen exhibit based on the papers of Karl Loewenstein, a U.S. diplomat active in post-WWII reconstruction. Digital Programs staff also worked with seminars on childhood and courses on Native American literature, and they continue to work with Research & Instruction librarians and archivists to develop common tools and approaches for new projects now in the pipeline. When teaching courses, Digital Programs staff emphasize the need to place digital projects in context—to think seriously about the intersection of questions, content, and methodology, and to make time for reflection and evaluation.

Digital Programs works closely with faculty outside the classroom as well. For example, staff are spearheading the “LGBT Rights in the Americas” project, a collaboration with faculty and librarians at the University of Massachusetts and Amherst College to create an interactive timeline charting significant events in the history of LGBT activism in the Americas, using an open, data-visualization platform for an extensible digital data collection.

And, finally, Digital Programs staff partner with staff in Archives & Special Collections to ensure long-term, sustainable access to the digital content produced by the Library and the college. Current efforts include work with web archiving tools and leadership of the Five College Digital Preservation Task Force’s Archivematica project.

II. Adopting Difficult Principles

Values & Beliefs.

We are not content to digitize and share what is unique to our library. While proud of what we own, we realize the material we digitize constitutes only a minuscule piece of the universal library. We aim to do more and share more—to have a meaningful role in transforming the entire ecosystem of information.

Actions.

Part of this “more” is sharing the scholarly output of our faculty, i.e., not allowing it to be locked behind paywalls and accessible only to those with deep pockets.

For two years members of the Library and the Faculty Library Committee organized talks, meetings, and informational sessions about trends in journal publishing, the economics of scholarly communication, and the growth of the open-access movement. This work culminated in a vote [by the entire Amherst faculty in March 2013](#), authorizing the college to disseminate their journal articles without charge. Amherst became only the seventh liberal-arts college in the country to adopt such a resolution.

The process was exhilarating: a model of invigorating conversation and debate, led by the Library, leading to an acknowledgment by the entire Amherst community of the foolishness inherent in giving away written scholarship and then buying it back at exorbitant rates. Keenly aware of the divisions such debates have created at other institutions, we are proud that this process at Amherst became a community-building exercise that fortified respect for the Library. Our favorite, tongue-in-cheek quote from a faculty member during the debate leading to the vote: “I’m afraid that if I do not vote for this my librarians may never speak to me again.”

Removing Barriers. The broad principle behind this resolution—that information should be free for all who need it—led the Library to adopt additional principles.

We resolved, for example,

- To sign no contracts that contain confidentiality or nondisclosure clauses. It is not sufficient, we concluded, to disseminate scholarship without charge; information about the price of scholarship, the price of the publications in which it appears, and the markets that establish those prices is essential as well. Signing confidential contracts limits the ability of our colleagues at other institutions to bargain, and thus, indirectly, hurts the students and faculty they serve.
- To sign no contracts for electronic books or journals—individually or in packages—without a provision for sharing those items via interlibrary loan. We did not make this decision lightly, since it prevents us from buying some material. But we concluded that any short-term gains realized by purchasing packages without ILL provisions will, in time, catch up with us, impoverishing the entire ecosystem of scholarly communication.
- To require no paperwork and to demand no fees to reuse or reprint material from our Archives & Special Collections. This decision cost us revenue, but it is the right decision because it removes barriers to scholarship. It allows librarians and scholars to focus on research and the joy of discovery rather than on paperwork and accounting. We also get a kick out of visiting scholars’ incredulity when we refuse to accept their money. This policy faced a severe test last year when Harvard University Press approached us about incorporating [our Emily Dickinson papers](#) (we own slightly over half of Dickinson’s oeuvre) into a new, online edition of Dickinson’s work. When we learned that Harvard planned to erect a paywall around the work, we declined the offer. In the end, Harvard, at our request, agreed to make the edition open access, and we then agreed to participate.
- To lead the charge in helping other libraries adopt and promote the principles described above. Our Librarian invited leaders at the Association of Research Libraries to explore the possibility of collective action, an invitation that led to multiple discussions with ARL’s leadership and several lawyers. Amherst and ARL contributed funds to commission a white paper from a law professor specializing in antitrust issues. Then, with a better understanding of what statutory and case law

may and may not permit, we joined the Macalester College Library in leading the eighty-library Oberlin Group [to adopt a resolution](#) on ethical principles we should all follow.

- To support as many open-access projects as possible. The Amherst Library is a founding member of (and one of only two liberal arts colleges to support) [Anvil Academic](#), an exclusively digital, open-access publishing venture. It is also a charter member of (and the first liberal-arts college to support) [Knowledge Unlatched](#), a consortium committed to moving into the public domain good work published by good presses.
- To create new publishing models. The Librarian of the College for three years chaired the task force governing the [Lever Initiative](#), an effort just taking flight to create a consortial, open-access, publishing model among liberal arts college libraries.

III. Creating a Press

Values & Beliefs.

Despite all of these efforts, we at Amherst believe that traditional academic publishing remains broken, and that our library and the Library profession will fail if we cannot build a new system.

The problems are widely known. Major players in the world of commercial scholarly publishing charge unsustainable prices for journals, and, increasingly, for books. Amherst pays over \$24,000 per year for its subscription to *Bioorganic and Medicinal Chemistry Letters*. Until recently our library paid Elsevier over \$350,000 per year for ScienceDirect. (We say “recently” because Amherst College found itself forced two years ago to cancel nearly all Elsevier journals lest it continue pillaging book budgets, budgets that themselves are strained by commercial publishers charging \$200 and even \$300 per book.)

We watch in dismay as other institutions—no matter how wealthy or well endowed—cut subscriptions and purchases. The effects of such cuts on the publishing industry are evident: good university presses canceling series, releasing fewer titles, slashing runs, and declining to consider manuscripts that lack broad appeal. Good manuscripts increasingly find homes (when they can find homes at all) only with presses that offer only meager if any editorial support.

And yet we know that we and other liberal-arts colleges are in a privileged position. Many institutions in the U.S. would be happy if their entire periodicals budgets contained anything near the amount more fortunate institutions cut from theirs. And institutions in the developing world have no hope of purchasing any scholarship. This last consideration often gets lost entirely in debates about the future of scholarly communication, and thus bears repeating: most of the world enjoys no access to scholarly literature.

“Incredibly fine and worthy enterprise ...
What a gift to the world.”

“Yeah! Practice what you preach! Well done!”

“Like this an indefinite number of times.
Information sharing is truly forward thinking.
Kudos ...”

“I’m a librarian who spends much of her time
advocating open access, and this makes me so
proud! Feeling especially warm and fuzzy about my
alma mater right now!”

—Comments on the Amherst Facebook page
on the launch of the Amherst College Press



We've structured a new publishing initiative to address these disparities around three founding commitments: (a) encouraging the emergence of new scholarship in the humanities under an open-access model; (b) developing this scholarship as digital-first publications; and (c) doing so from the perspective of and in response to the needs of liberal-arts institutions.

We've resolved to locate these efforts not at the fringe of campus where many university presses reside, but at the very physical and intellectual center of campus—in the Library, paid for with library funds repurposed from the existing library budget. Our library, like the college it serves, has as its mission the creation and communication of knowledge. As a community of scholars working in the liberal arts, Amherst must engage colleagues everywhere doing work at the frontiers of their fields. And as a college dedicated to preparing students of “exceptional potential” to “seek, value, and advance knowledge throughout their lives,” Amherst insists that the exploration of ideas, and the communication of those ideas as scholarship and artistic expression, improve the welfare and well-being of all people.

The [Amherst College Press](#) represents in part Amherst's desire to strengthen its position as a “research college.” Thus, in its strategic planning, Amherst has recommitted itself to undergraduate teaching while at the same time encouraging faculty at the frontiers of research in their fields. We believe a scholarly press should be a liminal space where a global community of scholars meets and supports scholars from other institutions—the work of the press's editorial board in a nutshell—while also building bridges to constituencies well outside the academy.



Such liminal spaces, however, are themselves becoming scarce. Amherst College Library established the Amherst College Press at a moment when considerations of profit and ownership hamper the communication of ideas between scholars, students, and readers. While profit and ownership are not harmful *per se*, they should not exclusively determine the means by which scholars communicate with peers and with others. Just as the Library encourages and protects academic freedom, so it facilitates the free exchange of ideas by breaking down any and all barriers inhibiting communication. In reclaiming for the Library the mission of scholarly communication in all its dimensions, we have committed ourselves:

- To finding and presenting scholarship that integrates ideas across disciplines, cultures, languages, and fields of study. Mindful of Amherst's commitment to excellence in teaching, the Amherst College Press seeks scholarship with particular promise for engaging and illuminating young minds themselves engaged in scholarship.
- To form an editorial board of Amherst faculty and others affiliated with the college, and through these internal players recruit the best possible external work, drawing to the press promising ideas of scholarly merit, and then improving those ideas through rigorous review and editing.
- To produce scholarship in formats accessible to scholars and readers everywhere, at no cost, through the Internet, and at the lowest practical cost in print.

In taking these steps we offer not only a different model for scholarly publishing, but also a voice not typically heard—the distinctive perspective of a liberal-arts institution—among the institutions that now publish scholarship.

From commitments to content. As a digital-first publisher we focus on scholarship better served by multimodal digital platforms. We believe that the humanities, no less than the sciences, will benefit from formats freed from the boundaries of print. Such works, of course, are subject to the same rigorous standards for evaluating more traditional work.

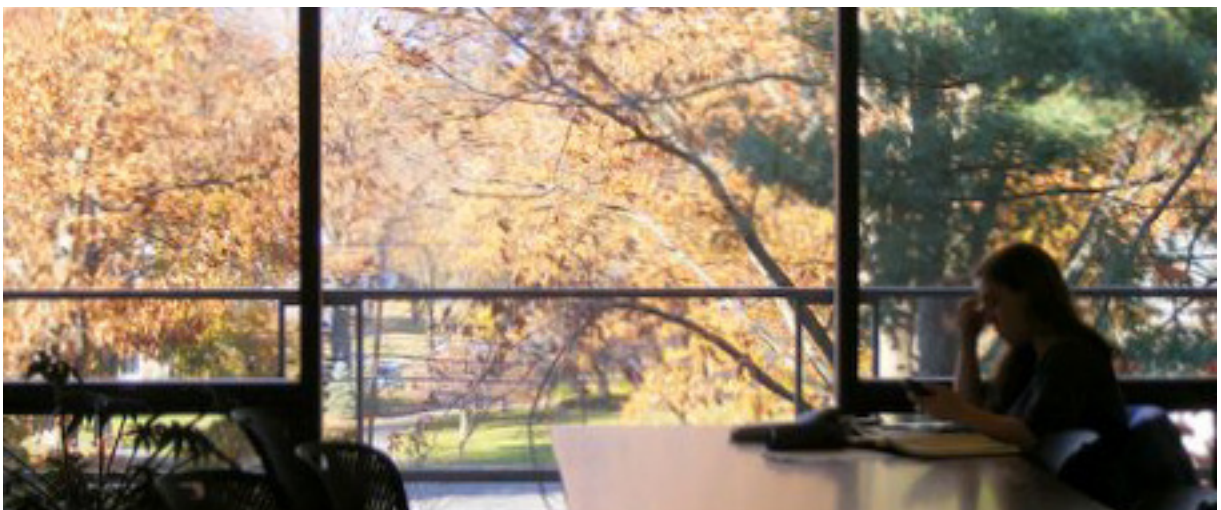
As an open access publisher, we assert that the necessary costs of assuring quality in content, design, and durability of publications should be central to the mission of academic institutions and their libraries. The market should neither limit access to scholarly work nor limit ideas to paying audiences or audiences fortunate enough to live at wealthy institutions. Accordingly, we look for works and fields:

- That have difficulty finding outlets for scholarship in the marketplace, yet enjoy an engaged and productive community of researchers and a clear place in the curriculum.
- Whose global community of scholars find themselves cut off from each other by paywalls and the sheer cost of accessing printed materials.
- That will be best served by the formats other than the monograph for communicating research and ideas.

To date the press has established four series, all described at the press's website:

- [Laws, Literatures, Cultures](#)
- [New Pathways for Studies in Ethnomusicology](#)
- [Public Works: Insights from the Humanities on Issues in the Public Square](#)
- [Why Does it Matter?](#)

The press has also become the “publisher” of the [New Books Network](#)—a groundbreaking and massive series of interviews with the authors of new books, organized according to 88 disciplines, numbering more than 1,600 podcasts, and now averaging some 75,000 downloads each week. The New Books Network is, to our mind, one of the most novel efforts afoot to bring scholarship to audiences outside the academy.



The initiatives outlined above represent efforts by the entire library serving the entire Amherst community. So we'll close with some reflections on the larger Amherst community and the Library's role in that community.

Amherst alumni have shown incredible support for our work. As one alum posted on Facebook after the launch of the Amherst College Press, "Could I love Amherst any more?" Such support manifests itself in financial support from the extended Amherst community. Friends of the Amherst Library raise about \$30,000 each year and alumni raised \$150,000 to purchase the Kim-Wait/Eisenberg collection. The Amherst Alumni network is now raising funds for the Press.

We are most proud, perhaps, of the support our faculty have thrown behind the efforts discussed above. It may not be apparent, at least at first, why the Amherst faculty would support such radical change. Our faculty constitutes, in many respects, an extraordinarily traditional body: fiercely devoted to close colloquy and residential education (it voted last year to reject an invitation to join edX), steadfast in supporting orthodox conceptions of a liberal-arts education (conceptions that countenance no professional or graduate courses), and committed to an expansive understanding of faculty prerogatives and faculty governance.

We believe the success of our initiatives, and the support faculty have thrown behind them, derive from essentially old-school principles—principles that, perhaps ironically, drive radical change.

Our faculty agreed to cancel journal subscriptions because they believe in the enduring import of books, whatever form books may assume. They welcomed librarians as classroom teachers because they believe face-to-face instruction remains the gold standard of education. They committed themselves to open access and a new model of publishing because they believe the literature of the liberal arts—a literature not patently fashionable—remains crucial in a changing world.

The library, then, launched its new ventures to support what our community holds dear, namely an environment (in the words of Amherst's [mission statement](#)) where students "seek, value, and advance knowledge, engage the world around them, and lead principled lives of consequence." Our librarians join our faculty in dedicating themselves (again, in the words of the mission statement) to "the highest standards of instruction in the liberal arts" and committing themselves "to learning through close colloquy and to expanding the realm of knowledge through scholarly research and artistic creation at the highest level."

So we return to our opening salvo with a twist: we are iconoclastic in pursuing iconophilic goals. We work within a tight community to promote global ideals. And we celebrate traditional library values through newfangled means.

All while having a great deal of fun.

Thank you for your consideration.

*Maryanne Alos • Christina Barber • Jane Beebe • K. Carley • Jo-Anne Chapin • Jennifer Chien
Margaret R. Dakin • Rosemary Davis • Sharon Domier • Mark Edington • Mark Fiegenbaum
Nancy Finn • Gretchen Gano • Bryn Geffert • Kate Gerrity • Kristen Greenland • Steven Heim
Rebecca Henning • Amy Johnson • Jan Jourdain • James Kelly • Michael Kelly • Susan J. Kimball
Sherry Laclaire • Mariah Leavitt • Cynthia Lepage • Judy Lively • Erin Loree • Ann Maggs
Winnifred Manning • Dunstan McNutt • Nona Monahin • Bilal Muhammad • Peter Nelson
Mary O'Brien • Janet Poirrier • Suzie Rivers • Missy Roser • Kelcy Shepherd • Susan Sheridan
Sara Smith • Paul Trumble • Sarah Walden*

