

**History, Philosophy, and Newspaper Library**  
**African American Research Center**  
**Annual Report FY2022**

**I Unit Narrative**

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1. Major activities and accomplishments of the unit in FY21 (July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022)

Highlights of the year include:

- With the Preservation Department, we applied for a 2022-2024 National Digital Newspaper Program (NDNP) grant to digitize 100,000 pages of historic Illinois newspapers from under-represented geographic areas and demographic groups. HPNL head Celestina Savonius-Wroth and Academic Professional Geoffrey Ross wrote the grant narrative and recruited a new advisory board. (We learned in August 2022 that we were awarded \$299,977, one of the largest NDNP grants awarded in this funding cycle, and the largest NEH grant awarded this year in the state of Illinois.)
- HPNL/AARC faculty member Courtney Becks hosted and moderated a virtual book launch/author event: an interview with Ayana Contreras, author of *Energy Never Dies: Afro-Optimism and Creativity in Chicago* (University of Illinois Press, 2021), followed by a panel discussion with Dr. Kamau Grantham and Professor Stacey Robinson. Courtney also co-produced an interview with Contreras for WILL's radio program "The 21<sup>st</sup>."
- We re-launched the Library Research Travel Grant, a donor-funded program initiated in 2018 by Celestina and colleagues in the Department of History, intended to provide funding for researchers who wish to consult any collection held by the Library. The travel grant had been on hold because of COVID. With a review committee consisting of Celestina, Steve Witt (IAS), Bill Maher (University Archives), and a faculty member from the Department of History, we established rolling deadlines to encourage researchers to visit throughout the year, revised and circulated the call for applications, and selected three award recipients for the summer of 2022.
- We expanded the reach of our undergraduate instruction efforts in three of the departments we support, experimenting with new ways to engage with large 100-level lecture courses in Religious Studies and Philosophy, and piloting intensive course-integrated library instruction in HIST 200, a required course for history majors.
- We made strategic additions to the library's collections. Major acquisitions this year included the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History; Underground Press Collection, Alternative Press Center Supplement, Units 3-8* (a large missing section of

an important collection of underground press newspapers); Brill's online *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* and *Encyclopedia of Sikhism*; and four artist's books by African American book artists, Tia Blassingame, *Remnants* and *Fundamental Education: Longing and Isolation in an Amer-Indian community*, and Alisa Banks, *Self and Inheritance*.

2. Major challenges faced by the unit during the period:

- Readjusting to in-person services; providing hybrid options for instruction and meetings.
- Scheduling complications due to need for quarantining and self-isolating.
- Expected departure of a crucial civil service staff member in August 2022; preparing to start AY 2023 short-staffed.

3. Contributions to Library-wide programs:

- Reference, research consultations, and other information services:
  - HPNL/AARC faculty, staff, and student employees provided robust reference and research support, seamlessly transitioning back to onsite work beginning the summer of 2021.
  - Celestina and Rebecca contributed regular hours to staffing of the main Information Desk.
  - Celestina, Courtney, Geoff, and Rebecca provided individualized research consultations for faculty and students.
  - Under Geoff's direction, HPNL continued to develop the Newspaper Database and the Illinois Newspaper Directory, newspaper resources that are valued by researchers across the state and the country. While investigating the possible purchase of missing segments of the *Underground Press Collection*, we discovered that Harvard, one of the only libraries that owns the whole collection, refers users to our Newspaper Database to locate individual titles within the collection (see <https://guides.library.harvard.edu/news/subject#un>).
- Instruction, liaison, outreach/engagement:
  - Celestina, Courtney, Geoff, and Rebecca provided library instruction, and created course-specific research guides, for undergraduate courses in History, African American Studies, Religious Studies, and Philosophy.
  - Celestina worked with two faculty members in the Department of History to develop and co-teach a research-skills intensive version of the required gateway course for History majors, HIST 200 (one section in Fall 2021 and another in Spring 2022).
  - Rebecca met with discussion sections of a large 100-level Religious Studies course to provide library instruction.
  - Celestina (with input from Geoff and Rebecca) developed a library skills Canvas module for a large 100-level Philosophy course.
  - We also created and maintained topical research guides in our subject areas.

- Especially noteworthy: Rebecca created new research guides for Buddhism, Hinduism, Jain Studies, and Taoism.
  - Celestina introduced new graduate students in History and Religious Studies to the Library:
    - Met with new graduate students in History and Religious Studies during Orientation.
    - Organized library session for Department of History's Graduate Proseminar (required for all new graduate students): invited colleagues with relevant subject expertise to participate and served as main presenter.
    - Participated in a virtual day-long event for admitted graduate students in History.
  - Celestina and Courtney served as the Library's liaisons to African American Studies and Jewish Studies (Courtney), History, Philosophy, and Religious Studies (Celestina).
    - Activities included attending orientation and other departmental events, meeting with department chairs, directors of undergraduate and graduate studies, library liaisons and departmental Library Committees, meeting candidates for faculty positions and prospective graduate students, discussing library acquisitions with faculty and students, and maintaining regular contact with our departments and programs, keeping faculty and students abreast of new collections and services, and soliciting their input on library matters.
  - Celestina, as affiliate faculty, attended departmental meetings in History; participated in the Department of History's Pre-modern Reading Group.
  - Geoff participated in the Library's Doctoral Research Support Program, including helping to lead interdisciplinary workshops, organizing networking events, and meeting with doctoral students.
- Digital content creation:
  - Celestina, Geoff, and Will Schlaack from Preservation successfully applied for a 2022-2024 National Digital Newspaper Program newspaper digitization grant to digitize another 100,000 pages of historic Illinois newspapers. Celestina and Geoff wrote the grant narrative, explaining our intent to involve other Illinois cultural heritage institutions in the effort to expand the accessibility of newspapers from regions of the state outside the Chicago metro area. The project, funded at \$299,977, will not only contribute to the creation of important historical digital content, it will also be a highly visible outreach activity, helping to demonstrate the value of University of Illinois programs to the citizens of the state.
- Collection development:
  - Built the Library's collections in the areas of African American Studies, History, Philosophy, historical newspapers, Religious Studies, History of Science, and Jewish Studies.
  - Managed a total collections budget of nearly \$600,000 (in addition to four approval plan funds).

- Collection management:
    - Kim completed the project of reclassifying HPNL's collection from DDC to LCC.
  - Staff training and development
    - Celestina and Geoff attended a multi-session Canvas training program.
    - Sarah attended the 2022 *Reaching Forward South* conference.
  - Diversity
    - Courtney supervised a graduate student employee who researched and wrote blog posts about African American newspapers digitized for the Illinois Newspaper Project/National Digital Newspaper Program.
    - Celestina worked with colleagues in the Arts and Humanities Division to draft and submit a proposal for an Indigenous Studies Library Resident. Although our proposal ultimately was not selected to be filled as part of the Residency program, we received encouraging feedback from the Residency Advisory Committee. It was also a valuable exercise in that it helped us think about how DEIA principles could be better reflected in our collection development practices.
  - Public engagement
    - Courtney hosted and moderated a virtual author event with Ayana Contreras, author of *Energy Never Dies: Afro-Optimism and Creativity in Chicago* (University of Illinois Press, 2021), followed by a panel discussion with Dr. Kamau Grantham and Professor Stacey Robinson. Courtney also co-produced an interview with Contreras for WILL's radio program "The 21<sup>st</sup>."
  - Library service
    - Celestina and Kim served on the search committee for the Classics Librarian.
    - Celestina also served on the Collection Development Committee and the Wellness Committee
    - Courtney served on the Mortenson Center Advisory Committee, the Nominations, Elections, and Voting Procedures (NEVP) Committee, the Outreach and Engagement Committee, and the Marketing Committee.
    - Geoff served on the Library Assessment Committee.
4. Review of progress made on Unit Annual Goals for FY21 (as enumerated in the FY20 Unit Annual Report)
- *Accomplished/Ongoing*: Develop programming related to our subject areas and collections that supports diversity, equity, and inclusion and helps to rebuild a sense of community in HPNL's physical space. (SD2, SD3)
    - *Accomplished*: began displaying selected new books with reviews written by unit staff as "staff favorites" to create a more interactive environment and increase circulation.
  - *Accomplished/Ongoing*: Work with Main Library and Undergraduate Library colleagues to develop vision for Main Library spaces in light of the Library Building Plan. (SD3)
    - *Accomplished*: conversion of high-use items from Dewey to LC classification.

- *Ongoing*: Continue review of circulating collection and assess appropriate balance of print and electronic formats.
- *Accomplished*: Work with Preservation to apply for 2022-2024 National Digital Newspaper Program funding to continue the work of the Illinois Newspaper Project. (SD3, SD4)
- *Accomplished/Ongoing*: Work with instructors and instruction-focused library colleagues to build upon skills and strategies for innovative instruction services, including transitioning some core instructional content from libguides to Canvas modules. (SD1, SD2)

#### 5. Unit Annual Goals for FY23.

- Advocate for, and if permitted, hire, a civil service position (preferably a Senior Library Specialist) to replace Sarah Bial, who leaves the Library in August 2022.
- Continue to provide excellent public service with a smaller staff for as long as necessary.
  - Staffing permitting, return to pre-COVID opening hours.
- Launch 2022-2024 National Digital Newspaper Grant with Preservation: hire Project Manager and/or graduate assistant(s), work with Advisory Board to develop proposal process, reach out to other Illinois libraries and cultural heritage repositories.
- Conditions permitting, continue to rebuild sense of community in HPNL's physical space.
  - Use a gift received through Advancement's "Library is looking for" initiative, earmarked for study carrels, to update the furniture/look and feel of user space.
- Continue to work with Main Library and Undergraduate Library colleagues to develop vision for Main Library spaces in light of the Library Building Plan.
  - Continue review of circulating collection.

#### 6. Graduate Assistants

- Rebecca Stover (Graduate Assistant, .25 FTE, August 15, 2021- present, funded on state funds). Rebecca's contributions in FY22 included:
  - Participating in the unit's instructional work, including developing teaching strategies for large lecture courses.
  - Contributing to staffing unit's public service point, and to training, supervising, and mentoring undergraduate student employees.
  - Providing reference coverage at the main Information Hub.
  - Social media outreach for HPNL/AARC.
  - Developing "staff favorites" new books display.
  - Revising and updating research guides on the unit's web site, including new guides for Buddhism, Hinduism, Jain Studies, and Taoism.
  - Collection development for Religious Studies (especially East Asian Religions) and popular history.

## II Statistical Profile

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### 1. Facilities

- Number of hours open to the public per week:
  - Summer II 2021: 40 hours/week
  - Fall 2021: 44 hours/week
  - Spring 2022: 44 hours/week
  - Summer I 2022: 40 hours/week

### 2. Personnel

- Celestina Savonius-Wroth (Head, faculty) (1 FTE)
- Courtney Becks (Faculty) (1 FTE)
- Geoffrey Thomas Ross (Collections and Services Specialist, Academic Professional) (1FTE)
- Kimberly Lerch (Senior Library Specialist) (.75 FTE)
- Sarah Bial (Library Specialist) (1 FTE)
- Rebecca Stover (Graduate assistant, see details above) (.25 FTE)
- student hourly: two graduate hourly employees, Jerilyn Tinio, approximately 10 hours/week summer 2021, and Najah Morris, 4 hours/week, summer 2021 – present, both paid on a combination of state and gift funds

### 3. User Services

- Gate Count (extrapolated from Sweeps Week data): 18,064
- Circulation:
  - Check outs: 6,178
  - Renewals: 4,196
- Reference interactions (extrapolated from Sweeps Week data): 784
- Presentations (from the Instructional Statistics database)
  - Number of presentations to groups: synchronous 27, asynchronous 1
  - Number of participants in group presentations (synchronous): 567
- additional presentations (not recorded in Instructional Statistics database): two asynchronous presentations

## III Appendices (optional)

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- Please see attached HPNL\_FY22\_Appendix.pdf (Ayana Contreras flyer).