

Grinnell College Libraries Annual Report for 2021-2022

AREAS OF FOCUS FOR 2021-2022

Library Planning

In the mid-1950's, Grinnell planned a new library to support its growing collections of almost 200,000 volumes and designated 550 seats for a student body of under 950. The design was mid-century modern and tailored to the learning models of its time: students silently studying in isolation. As the College thrived, library holdings exploded to over 750,000 volumes (doubling the building's initial planned capacity of 350,000 volumes), books and bound journals displaced students even as enrollment increased to over 1,650 students until we could only seat about 360 students. The College invested heavily in upgrading nearly all components of its physical plant as its national profile grew, creating buildings that supported evolving pedagogies, technologies, and learning styles, but Burling Library remained firmly fixed in time. In recent years many of the main libraries at Peer 16 institutions, already averaging twice the size of tiny Burling (54,600 sq. feet vs. the group's average of 122,000 sq. feet), have been substantially renovated or entirely replaced by updated facilities.

In 2021-22, Grinnell took a significant first step in considering what a new library could be. We engaged Brightspot Consulting, a firm that helped Kenyon, Smith, and many other peer institutions to begin campus discussions of their libraries. Over the spring semester, we interviewed 50 members of the campus staff, faculty, and leadership; held four onsite workshops and facilities tours; and distributed a campus-wide survey that was completed by over 650 Grinnellians, nearly 500 of whom were students. These activities culminated in a summary report to the Library Planning Working Group and senior administration that identified six goals for a library project at Grinnell and presented costs for a range of building scenarios the college might pursue. This document is now ready for broader consideration and can foster richer campus discussions of the future of Grinnell's library.

COVID & the Transition Back

The Libraries created and facilitated plans for a return to face-to-face services in the fall of 2021. A self-checkout station was purchased and set up for contactless book checkout, socially distanced seating/study spaces were created for patrons, semi-private distanced workspaces were designed and setup for staff, and flex space for breaks/meals for staff without private offices was designated. The option of remote/flexible work helped to reduce the number of faculty/staff in specific library spaces.

Digital Scholarship Systems & Support

The digital creation, dissemination, and preservation of scholarship continues as a core part of the Libraries' work. We are evaluating software needs for Digital Grinnell, our repository for digitized archival collections and faculty/staff/student scholarship. Recognizing that the current platform did not provide strong privacy protections for born-digital, confidential documents received from campus units such as the President's office, we have begun working with Preservica as a supplemental platform. The Libraries are also deepening engagement with the creation of digital scholarship. The Libraries are the home of Haitian Arts Digital Crossroads Project. In collaboration with DLAC and the Center for the Humanities, we also support the Vivero Digital Fellows program, which provides a trained cohort of student collaborators for faculty and staff digital projects and peer mentoring.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Library Collections and Services

The Libraries are working to embody diversity, equity, and inclusion in all areas of our mission, including general collection development, Special Collections, outreach efforts, and digital scholarship. After completing a staff-wide professional development series in summer 2020 ("Equity in Action"), all Library departments and working groups have actively evaluated and implemented changes in practice to work toward greater equity for all members of the campus community.

CHALLENGES, ACHIEVEMENTS & OPPORTUNITIES FROM 2021-22

Aging Infrastructure and Accessibility

One ongoing challenge the library will continue to deal with is an aging building with failing infrastructure and limited/data and electric options. Numerous elevator breakdowns created accessibility issues and prevented Circulation workflows from being completed for several weeks. Periodic plumbing issues in restrooms caused accessibility issues and inconvenienced students/faculty/staff several times. Our attempts to update/renovate spaces and make them accessible at Burling (Circulation desk area, Media area, staff restrooms) have been delayed multiple times when trying to work within the budget cycle/BM&E, schedule with outside vendors, and coordinate with Facilities Management all at the same time.

Technology Challenges & Improved Ticketing and Asset Management

Returning from remote learning and work presented multiple technology challenges. A lot of equipment had been moved, so workstations had to be reassembled. During this process, we discovered that many workstations, particularly those relied upon by staff and student workers, were much older and more worn than they should have been allowed to become. The Burling basement computer lab's machines were in need of many updates, which were delayed due to the heavy demand on ITS for classroom support. The first-floor computing area was also in need of many updates, which contributed printing problems at the start of the academic year. The second-floor classroom required substantial AV support before it was usable. To improve internal library communication about technology needs, a library ticket system was put into place, as well as an asset management software to track technology age and location. Our goal is to better match technology to work needs and update it as necessary.

Staffing Challenges

Burling Library and Kistler Science Library's public facing service model is heavily reliant on student staff to keep the libraries open and providing services. The number of Grinnell College students seeking on-campus jobs is down significantly over the past three years. The Libraries have been hit hard with this staffing shortage. More time has been spent advertising, hiring, training, and retaining new student staff. Supervisors are under added stress and heavier workloads, especially given uncertainties around unionization. Since May, student supervisors have been operating on an "indefinite hold" for all student job changes, workplace expectations, and hiring/training/evaluating practices until union negotiations are finalized.

Opportunities in Records Management & Digitization

For many years, Special Collections & Archives has been providing advice on managing physical records to a select group of campus administrative offices. With the addition this year of Preservica, a cloud-based system for archiving digital records, Special Collections is now in a better position to provide campus-wide records management services for both physical and digital records. This year special Collections acquired a scanner specifically designed to provide high-quality images of delicate books. This scanner will be used first to scan the incunabula from the Salisbury House Library Collection, then other incunabula from the rare books collection. These scans will be hosted locally but will be made available online and will be discoverable via global tools such as WorldCat. Incunabula – and other rare materials from Special Collections that we also hope to scan – are often one-of-a-kind, so the Grinnell College Libraries are pleased to be able to share our unique resources with the world in this way.

Enhancing Our Collections

One of our main achievements for 2021-22 was further enriching our resource collections in terms of quantity, diversity, and accessibility. This was accomplished while leveraging package discounts, consortial purchasing, Evidence-based Acquisition (EBA), and demand driven purchasing models (DDA) to maximize our acquisitions funds. We continued to add large numbers of books (as ebooks) to our collection as part of ongoing EBA agreements and as outright purchases (for example, adding front files from Columbia University Press, University of Chicago Press, University of Pennsylvania Press, and the University of Texas Press). We also added substantial ebook back files from publishers like Harvard University Press, Springer, and Palgrave. These continuing ebook additions complemented our already substantial digital journal collection.

Based on student, faculty, and staff use, we also added several primary source collections that included newspapers (like the *Baltimore Afro-American* and *The Times of India*) and digital archive collections (examples, the *Black Studies Center* and *Colonial Caribbean*).

Streaming video is a burgeoning academic tool, and we expanded our streaming collection by subscribing to *Docuseek* and upgrading our *Films on Demand* subscription in addition to the continued acquisition of individual films.

AREAS OF FOCUS FOR 2022-2023

Library Planning – Next Steps

After beginning to engage campus stakeholders in library planning last spring, we hope to continue broadening library planning during the 2022-23 academic year. We have the final report from Brightspot, which should foster discussion and guide potential conversation about what a new library could be at Grinnell. Tentatively, we intend to introduce the report to the board's Facilities Committee in the late fall and get their guidance on next steps, then hope to resume campus discussions in the spring semester, raising the topic with key groups like ISC and Executive Council.

Initial library planning identified six broad goals for the new library, outlined in the Brightspot report, and sketched out four building scenarios for the college to review. It will be vital to explore these goals and scenarios in dialogue with the broader strategic planning efforts currently underway and ably led by Caleb Elfenbein and Monica Chavez-Silva. Mark Christel is coordinating with Caleb and Monica to consider how to best coordinate library planning with overall strategic planning efforts.

Finally, if Grinnell does intend to proceed with a major library project in the next 5-7 years, we want to be very intentional during 2022-23 to have the discussions, conduct viability studies, make the decisions, prepare the appropriate materials, and develop a full communication plan that positions us well for fundraising efforts, provides the case study for the upcoming campaign, and maintains progress on this complex project. Generational equity is a key theme many on campus have articulated and we believe the current state of Burling underserves current students and the contemporary research needs of our community. Therefore, we feel a real obligation to be efficient and expeditious in our planning, without compromising our deep commitments to an inclusive and deliberative process.

Collection Development Strategies

We have identified multiple collection priorities going forward in response to a trend of fewer faculty recommendations. Based both on historical patterns of and current usage, we will continue adding front and back files of digitized books (ebooks) and journals from university presses and major commercial publishers. We will also continue to add/make more films available as streaming videos in response to user expectations and preference. Particular initiatives for 2022-23 are to expand our popular reading collection (as print books and possible audiobooks) and recreational film collection (adding the Swank Top 1000+ collection--feature films from the 1930's forward, which will also be used for academic purposes). Both these initiatives reflect efforts to improve student, faculty, and staff mental health.

Systems Evaluation and Planning

Library services depend on maintaining and coordinating multiple large-scale digital information management systems. With the arrival of Kayla Reed in the newly imagined position of Digital Systems and Strategy Librarian, we are undertaking review of multiple systems to ensure that they are meeting our needs and that we are adapting our workflows to use them effectively:

- **Alma-Primo** is our core system for discovery, catalog management, and lending. We migrated to this system in 2017 and have always planned to engage the vendor, Ex Libris, in a workflow review after an initial period of usage. This was delayed by the pandemic, but we are beginning that review now. This review will improve overall usage experience of Alma and create more efficient workflows for many library departments.

- The Alma-Primo review will help prepare us to join the **TRAC network**, a consortium of over ten other Iowa academic libraries. We will need to adjust and do testing on new settings to prepare to lend and borrow with other institutions.
- **Third Iron**, a next-generation link resolving tool, will be integrated to improve library resource discovery and patron interactions.
- A comprehensive evaluation of **Digital Grinnell**, currently hosted on the open source Islandora platform, continues. We are pushing ourselves to be creative in imagining future directions for this platform, which may include sharing materials in a hub such as JSTOR Community Commons. We are participating in JSTOR Community Commons trial, adding select collections to this widely known hub for primary source discovery to evaluate how it would fit in our goals of making the history and scholarly contributions of Grinnell College widely and openly accessible.

Facility Renovations

The Libraries received facilities funding to undertake two renovation projects this year.

The basement media room has been in a process of transformation for several years. As streaming video and audio have grown, there has been less use of onsite video/audio players. The space began shifting toward media creation with the addition of a small video production studio and the consolidation of media collections into compact shelving. Planned renovations for this year will continue that transformation by creating space for digital humanities computing workstations, audio recording, and more workstations for video editing

Renovations for the Circulation area at Burling Library are currently underway. Updated electrical, lighting, and three-foot walking paths will make this remodeled staff/student worker space accessible, safe, and more equitable.

ONGOING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION EFFORTS WITHIN THE LIBRARIES

1. **Collection development:** Librarians have been intentional in making sure that underrepresented groups are included as authors, creators, and topics of materials we recommend or choose for the collection. The Collections Cluster includes DEI criteria when we evaluate collections and packages to add (streaming film, ebooks, etc.). The Libraries provide an extensive collection of high quality images to the College via ArtStor. Karen Hueftle-Worley, Image Curator, has researched and then added art and cultural artifact images to the collection from underrepresented groups, regions and time periods.
2. **Special Collections:** Our Special Collections materials, like those of many U.S. colleges, are dominated by Western-centric materials. We've begun a concerted effort to acquire materials more representative of Eastern, non-cis, and non-White cultures, which we're informally referring to as the Social Justice Collection. Acquisitions for this collection have included an analog recording of an interview between James Baldwin and Alex Haley and *Emancipation Car*, a collection of abolitionist/anti-slavery songs and prose written by an African American who was a conductor on the Underground Railroad.
3. **Outreach Activities** – All outreach activities – whether special displays, social media posts, crafting activities, or event programming are intentionally designed with DEI as a strong component. Displays highlighting library collections rotate throughout the year. We guide student workers in curating these displays, and in 2021-22 the students planned each display, no matter what the theme, to make sure that materials by, about, or directed towards underrepresented groups were included. We also had several displays with a DEI theme – such as Black History Month and our Banned Books Week Display with a focus on banned LGBTQ+ themed titles. Programming is also designed make sure that a wide variety of groups and underrepresented groups can feel welcome or see themselves. For example, when we hosted ornament making in Burling Lounge, we provided examples and materials for making ornaments related to more than just one culture or religion. We also aim to provide multiple avenues and levels of engagement with programs and activities – reading materials to take away, individual participation, group participation, or anonymous/asynchronous participation.

4. **Digital Scholarship:** The Haitian Arts Digital Crossroads project is a collaboration with the Waterloo Center for the Arts, led by Dr. Petrouchka Moise, that aims to make Haitian art collections digitally accessible. A transformative element of this project is its development of an extensive and culturally sensitive metadata schema that will greatly enhance knowledge of Haitian artists and art. The Vivero Digital Fellows program continues to grow in its work of diversifying the practitioner community and content of digital humanities scholarship, this year supporting 11 student fellows and 13 faculty/staff research projects, including Dr. Tamara Beaubouef's "Edith Renfrow Smith's Grinnell," Dr. Stephanie Jones's "Mapping Racial Trauma," and Dr. Albert Lacson's "Omaha Digital Hub."