Chavez collection continues legacy of excellence p. 14
Professor Emerita Jyotsna Singh leaves lasting impact on early modern archives p. 22
A Message from the Dean of Libraries

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the Spring 2024 edition of Insight! I’m delighted to be able to share with you some recent news about the wonderful resources and people at the MSU Libraries. This issue spotlights Diana Rivera’s work in establishing the Chavez collection within our Stephen O. Murray & Keelung Hong Special Collections as well as the generous endowment made by Professor Emerita Jyotsna G. Singh to the Special Collections’ early modern collections. The contributions of both Rivera and Singh strongly align with the MSU Libraries’ mission to provide resources for discovery and creation, for which I am sincerely grateful.

I also wanted to provide an update on the construction that has been underway at the Main Library to realize the reimagination of the Libraries’ services and spaces. The new home for the Center for Teaching and Learning Innovation (CTLI) and Office of Faculty and Academic Staff Development on 2-West opened in October 2023. Students also make use of the meeting rooms in the CTLI when it becomes available to them on evenings and weekends. We have also updated a number of group study rooms on 2-West, which is making that floor a popular spot to be in the library!

You might not be surprised to hear that Starbucks has also been quite a student (and staff!) destination since opening Jan. 8 on the first floor of the Main Library’s West Wing. Mobile ordering is a welcome option, and we’ve updated the cafe seating area with new furnishings as well. The Farmer’s Fridge vending machine is also a wonderful addition to the space, providing salads and other fresh options. Renovations for the Children’s Nook area to the east of the cafe are also being planned for the coming academic year.

This past June saw the start of the construction phase in our transformative project to remodel 3-East as the new home for our Murray & Hong Special Collections. Walls are currently being drywalled and painted and flooring is being laid, with the installation of new shelving to follow. The facility also has state-of-the-art climate and security controls for these extremely valuable collections, with beautiful office and processing spaces for the faculty, staff and students that work with the collections daily. We anticipate completion of this project and a ribbon-cutting for the new space this fall.

Finally, I wanted to share my gratitude for your help in making this past Give Green Day on March 12 the second most successful the Libraries has seen since the program’s inception in 2016. Thanks to our generous global Spartan community, the Libraries was able to raise $11,900, the majority of which will go directly to support student programming. The success of this event provided a wonderful capstone to my first six months in the role of dean of the MSU Libraries. I am excited to continue sharing the good work coming out of the Libraries with you all as we move forward.

Sincerely,

Neil Romanosky, PhD
Dean of Libraries
New library faculty bring support to comics, African studies and open educational resources

This past year MSU Libraries welcomed Jason Larsen as Comics Librarian, Chenjerai Mabhiza as African Studies Librarian and Linda Miles as Open Educational Resources (OER) Librarian. Communications Manager Elise Jajuga asked each of these new faculty members five questions.
EJ: In looking at your background, it seems you might have arrived at comics librarianship in a unique way. Can you just begin by giving me a little bit about your background and how you came to comic studies?

JL: I definitely came to comics librarianship in a roundabout way. I started out in annuities and insurance, but I worked in the MSU Libraries as an undergrad, and I was actually at the Main Library when I graduated. I had realized at that point that I wanted to do librarianship, but I had just earned my degree in marketing. And it was one of those things where you don’t know what you don’t know, and I was trying to figure out how to come back to it. It took about 20 years, but I always knew I wanted to work in the field of library science. So finally in 2014 I had the chance to attend a panel where Randy Scott, the MSU Libraries comics bibliographer whom I had met during my time working at the Libraries, and Caitlin McGurk from Ohio State University were both talking about their collections. It kind of made the light bulb click, and I had the realization that if comics librarianship is what I wanted to do, then this is the moment to do it because the profession had matured enough for comics librarianship to be recognized as a legitimate career in the profession more than it was back in the 1990s, when it pretty much only existed as an idea. Now, it’s actually a niche that concretely exists in academic scholarship. So I decided that was the time to go back and do it, but it was also a huge 180 career turn at that stage in life. From there I basically pivoted into state work because I knew I needed to get a job outside of private industry to have a little more flexibility. At that point, I began doing all the groundwork to go back to school and get my library information science degree. I’m a lifelong comic reader, so to me coming to comics librarianship was just kind of the perfect marriage between what I love and what I wanted to really do for a long time.

EJ: Is there any aspect of your previous work outside of librarianship that helps inform your role as Comic Studies Librarian?

JL: I think a lot of my experiences inform my work here, especially from the state perspective. I had experience in project management from my work in the private sector, and when I left the private sector for the job with the state, it was partly because I knew I had a five-year plan to get to this kind of a role. So I transitioned to a job with the State of Michigan as a project coordinator, and then within a year I realized it wasn’t going to give me the flexibility I needed. I ended up taking a position as a data analyst, which, with research being my background in marketing, wasn’t a far stretch for my skillset. The postsecondary data reporting unit at the state is responsible for collecting data from all the independent colleges, universities, and community colleges in Michigan. Part of my job was to analyze the budget bills, and honestly it was fascinating to be able to look at the state budget appropriation bills and see how money was allocated to each school. I think it really underscored my understanding of return on investment (ROI). And I know that’s potentially a scary term for a lot of librarians to hear, but I am not intending the term of ROI to be meant fiscally — here it means if you put resources toward something, you need to be able to show something tangible.
back out of it. It’s different with postsecondary education because you’re using resources to facilitate the acquisition or creation of knowledge. Therefore, while its direct impact is difficult to measure, the outcome of the resources used are not. For example, if I buy a comic for the Libraries, I should be able to justify what I’m using it for in my outcomes — like what instruction I’m going to use it in, or how it builds the R1-level collection that this institution has. These, to me, are some of the skills that I bring to the comics librarian role, outside of the budgeting skills that came from being a project manager.

**EJ:** Your perspective coming from your work as a State of Michigan data analyst seems especially unique to this role, including skills like ROI assessment. How do you use your analysis skill set with the Libraries’ comics resources?

**JL:** Because I’m new to the role, right now I am assessing the collection by looking for gaps in it. Like basically seeing what the collection lacks — as an example, trying to make sure it’s as diversely representative as it can be and then using analysis toward either increasing the diversity of the collection to include voices that we haven’t had previously or increasing their presence if they were not largely represented there. For example, I’ve recently been focusing on Black creators. I compiled a list of resources from Black comic scholars that say, here are the most prominent Black creators that have made comics. These creators should be in our collection as they are part of the cultural narrative of the comics medium. I ran this list of creators against our catalog, and while we had some, we did not have a strong sampling of their works. This is an example of an area where I can take the funds I have and apply them to acquiring those creators’ works, and then use metrics to show the decrease in the gap of representation in our collection as an outcome. I’m a data-driven librarian, which is kind of goofy in retrospect because I deal with a very graphic and artistic medium. But I still don’t think data should drive all decisions — to me, data is my information point to help me decide, but it doesn’t tell me what my decision is or what my collection values are. It’s just the foundational starting point for me to use to begin making collection choices.

**EJ:** How do you encourage student engagement with the Comic Studies Collection through your work in outreach, engagement and instruction?

**JL:** Comics is a visual medium, and if I’m going to talk to people, especially students, about comics and how you can use them, I want them to have a relatable takeaway. Like, here’s an example of a comic that deals with the U.S. health care system, or here’s a comic that deals with democracy. It’s a way to show students that the materiality connects to them, and that’s the whole point of comics. A deeper part of the job is explaining why comics are a great tool for other types of learning. They are a tool for teaching information literacy, critical thinking skills, science and STEM. They are applicable to all these different areas, which is also something that the comics medium itself is starting to figure out as it matures. I know it sounds silly, but a fun part of the job is going into a lecture with a group of students and asking if they’ve ever used comics in the classroom before. You might get two or three hands, although I know a lot of the secondary teachers use comics, so I’m curious to see if that number of hands up eventually grows. Like how will that matriculate upward to higher education if comics start being used regularly in the K-12 classrooms? Because then students will have exposure to comics in the classroom as a device that’s not just entertainment, but that can be used for education, too.

**EJ:** The Comics Collection at MSU is known for being the largest publicly accessible comic book collection in the world; do you have any specific goals around how you’d like to see the Comics Collection expand?

**JL:** I have several, but one of my ultimate goals, which is quirky to say, is to make sure I can hand this off when I retire. We have this amazing world-class comic collection — just because it’s world-class doesn’t mean I can rest on the laurels of it. It was a 50-year legacy to get it here, and now I have to make sure that in the next 20-30 years I put some planning in place to ensure it goes beyond my time here. That it can continue past me, which is just a simple fact of how I look at taking a job that’s historically never been one in the profession. I’m the second librarian to have this job here. Randy Scott was the first in the field to actually make this job a thing. I always include this bit of history when I discuss the collection in my student sessions about the collection: Randy made this job possible. If he hadn’t had the foresight to say, I think comic cataloging is a way to make this into a position, comic studies would likely not look the way it does today. I’m also aware that this collection exists in large part to our donors, as it was built from an original donation of six thousand comics that has now grown to approximately 350 thousand comics. Without our donors we wouldn’t be in the position we’re in to grow forward. I know the Library of Congress likes to Tweet that they have the largest comics collection at 175 thousand pieces. We double that. It’s not like we’re going to get into a Twitter war with the Library of Congress, but it’s important for our donors to understand this is a historically significant collection that we have here, and a large part of it would not exist without them.
Chenjerai Mabhiza
African Studies Librarian

Chenjerai Mabhiza joined the MSU Libraries as African Studies Librarian in August 2023. The African Studies Librarian reports to the Coordinator of Humanities disciplines. The position focuses on the collection development needs of Africana studies as part of a two-person team that serves the African Studies Center and supports faculty, students and researchers across 46 departments engaged with African studies. As African Studies Librarian, Chenjerai engages in professional development and scholarly activities related to the position and serves on library and university committees as elected or assigned. His previous work experiences span over 20 years in academic and research libraries in Southern Africa, including roles as Librarian and Head of User Services Department at the University of Namibia; Librarian at the Namibian Agriculture and Water Information Centre, Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry, Namibia; and Faculty Librarian in Arts and Humanities at University of Zimbabwe (UZ). He is a former Secretary General for University of Zimbabwe Librarians, Zimbabwe Library Association Chairperson for Mashonaland Branch and Namibia INASP Country Representative. Chenjerai has served as a member of the Research4Life User Advisory Council for many years and is a member of the African Studies Association (ASA) and the Africana Librarians Council (ALC). He recently joined the Cooperative Africana Materials Project of the Center for Research Libraries.

EJ: You've held quite a few librarianship positions, mainly in Africa; can you provide a bit of background on how you came to librarianship initially?

CM: I assumed responsibility as a temporary primary school teacher immediately after completing high school. Due to a shortage of qualified teachers at the time, my former local primary school requested me to help them. I ended up teaching there for a period of about two years. It was before the internet era, and access to the latest news and information in rural communities was difficult. We got a newspaper once a week; that, coupled with the fact that there was no electricity, frustrated me as a young man. Although I had used a public library in Bulawayo (Zimbabwe) during primary school, I did not know that working in libraries was a job that required one to undergo professional training. I came across a student recruitment advertisement in a weekly Sunday newspaper from the Library School at Harare Polytechnic College while at our rural township one weekend and decided to take a chance.

When I was invited for interviews in Bulawayo, I engaged my uncle, a University of Zimbabwe trained mechanical engineer, in a detailed discussion about the “unknown librarianship profession” in Zimbabwe at the time. My immediate family wanted me to choose familiar professions such as teaching, nursing, joining the army, etc., because there were no risks associated with these professions and students were guaranteed government financial support during training, but I objected.

The choice I made and risk I took caused a strain in family relations. I used savings from my teaching job to pay tuition fees. My savings got depleted after two years and there were some anxious moments during my third year at Harare Polytechnic until I got a student librarian job at the Consumer Council of Zimbabwe.

At the Library School, only 3 out of 25 students were already library employees at different organizations; the rest of us relied on their practical work experience during class group discussions. Surprisingly, the inexperienced young students performed better in class assignments, tests and presentations. I do not know if I can attribute this to being open-minded and objective, because we knew practically nothing about the real library world until after a few internships.

EJ: Were there any internships you had that especially stood out?

CM: The most interesting internship I had was at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ), during my third year at the Library School. It was a paid internship, so, you know, as a student, you get excited, but also, it was the biggest academic library in the country, with a very big structure and branch libraries. For example, I was deployed to the Faculty of Education branch library, but cataloging and classification were centralized, meaning I would go to the Technical Services Department
in the main library to perform those tasks. The main library presented us interns with an opportunity to interact with many professionals and subject specialists, unlike smaller libraries. Coincidentally, I was invited for a student librarian job interview at the Consumer Council of Zimbabwe (CCZ) following the internship at the UZ. The knowledge and skills acquired during internships at the UZ Library, British Council and Gweru Memorial Library helped me to perform well during the CCZ interview. I continued to work at the CCZ when I completed my three-year diploma program at the Library School. My mandate at the CCZ was to establish a relatively small, specialized library that supported economists, social workers and media practitioners’ research interests in fighting for consumers’ rights against unscrupulous traders, unfair competition, rising inflation against a backdrop of poor civil servant salaries, and government regulation of market forces. After some months at the CCZ, I was invited for interviews for a more lucrative contract job by UZ. And based on performance during the interview and recommendation from the previous internship supervisor, I was appointed for the job.

EJ: In your experience, how do academic libraries in Africa differ from those in the United States?

CM: Before the internet era, most academic libraries had huge multiple copy textbook collections for undergraduate students in different programs. Structurally, Area Studies is a new concept to me. Most African universities employ subject liaisons to serve the needs of a particular faculty, department or school, irrespective of geographical regions. Many students are poor and cannot afford to buy textbooks. Subject liaisons, faculty or college librarians facilitate the acquisition of multiple copies of textbooks listed on students’ course outlines/syllabus. Material selection is narrowly focused on specific teaching and research needs of the department and faculty at the university. Broad acquisition outside curriculum and research bounds is only done if the budget allows. Subject liaisons at UZ manage their physical collections as well; they have technical staff responsible for shelving and stack management who work directly under them. The University of Namibia (UNAM) has a comparable structure. I had bigger professional responsibilities at UNAM, serving in the capacity of Head of Department for User Services, which meant coordinating the operations of all subject liaisons, campus libraries, reference services, circulation and inter-library lending. I was also responsible for coordinating the generation of library documentation in preparation for accreditation of academic programs by external assessors for quality assurance and approval by the National Council for Higher Education. I served on UNAM Senate, Postgraduate Studies Committee, and other university committees and task forces.

EJ: You were also working in Africa when e-books started becoming a larger part of the publishing landscape; what did the evolution of e-books look like in African librarianship?

CM: African university libraries started acquiring e-book collections soon after their adoption by U.S and European academic libraries. A few notable issues that African university libraries faced in their decision-making regarding acquisition of e-books were e-book business (supplier) models before 2009, license agreements restrictions, cost and poor Internet connectivity.

First, e-book business models, used subscription or purchase structures where titles are sold in a package versus individually. Subscription to an individual e-book title with access restrictions was not convenient to African universities because most vendors’ license agreements restricted usage of each e-book to a single user at a time. Added to this was frustration arising from slow download speed caused by poor or unstable internet connectivity and limited bandwidth. Second, most university libraries in Southern Africa found e-books to be costly before 2009. Many e-book packages on the market had fewer titles relevant to African university curriculum. The perceptions of librarians at Southern African universities were that e-book publishers and vendors had discovered a clever way of compelling libraries to pay for irrelevant and unpopular titles in the form of packages. This was one point of contention discussed during a University Libraries Directors’ e-book workshop hosted by Springer Link in Cape Town, South Africa. University of South Africa (UNISA), a distant education university with the largest student population in Africa, shared findings from their observations and experiences on the use of e-books by students after acquiring several packages. UNISA Libraries reported that e-book packages were only used by students during the first year of acquisition, and there was zero usage the following year. Additionally, downloading content was restricted to a single chapter at a time. Publishers and vendors changed their business models and license restrictions gradually following numerous complaints from academic institutions across the world. Rapid technological developments regarding online publishing, open access publishing models, university presses, the emergence of institutional repositories and organizational websites brought stiff competition to commercial publishers and vendors. They catalyzed many changes that we see today in e-book business models. These developments also lowered the cost of e-books significantly. Many African universities are still experiencing challenges related to low bandwidth and unstable internet connectivity.
Linda Miles has served as the Open Educational Resources (OER) Librarian since December of 2023. She is responsible for the management of the Open Educational Resources Unit, providing leadership, vision and support to the Libraries’ open education initiatives. She facilitates the OER Team, providing support to faculty adopting, adapting, creating and improving open textbook materials. Her prior experience includes seven years serving as OER Librarian and Head of Reference in the Hostos Community College Library, part of the City University of New York. She also spent four years as Public Services and User Experience Librarian at Yeshiva University after beginning her career at the library of the former Lincoln Center Institute, an arts education nonprofit organization. She has coauthored the monograph “How to Thrive as a Library Professional: Achieving Success and Satisfaction” for Libraries Unlimited (2020) as well as numerous chapters and journal articles. She has held leadership roles within both the Greater Metropolitan New York chapter of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL/NY) and the Community & Junior College Libraries section of ACRL. She holds a bachelor’s degree from Hope College, a master’s degree in library and information science from St. John’s University and a doctorate in theatre history and criticism from the University of Texas at Austin.

**EJ:** Can you provide a brief definition of OER and an overview of how the MSU Libraries incorporates OER materials?

**LM:** One oft-cited definition for open educational resources (OER) comes from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Accordingly, OER are any type of materials focused on teaching, learning or research that have been made openly available for anyone to use, and sometimes to adapt and re-use. The Libraries’ primary OER initiative is our grant program for faculty who create or adopt OERs for their courses. When it comes to any particular grant program, you sort of have to delineate what you mean by OER for the purposes of the awards. The lines that we’ve drawn around our award program right now, and this may change, is that we are supporting the creation of electronic books that are quite interactive in a way that a physical book isn't. They are interactive electronic books, but they are still within the paradigm of a book for students, so textbook affordability is the goal and students are the audience. At the same time, I’ve only been at MSU Libraries for four months now, but I have had conversations with at least four people who had projects they were really passionate about that were outside of our delineation. So, there's this world of people here who are interested in making what they create openly accessible for a variety of reasons, and one of the goals I have is to seek out and identify the pockets of people on campus who are interested in things like open education, open access and OER. Those concepts are all related, but they’re all a little bit different. I’ve begun having conversations with some of these campus stakeholders, thinking about ways to open up publishing opportunities for students, faculty and staff at MSU.

**EJ:** How did you become interested in working with OER?

**LM:** After graduating with my library degree, I worked at Yeshiva University for four years doing public services. There was a lot of turnover in the leadership, and I decided I wanted something else. So I got a job at Hostos Community College, which is part of the City University of New York (CUNY). CUNY has 24 campuses, and six of them are community colleges. The OER movement pretty much started in community colleges, and Hostos was one of the campuses that got in pretty early on a national grant program to develop Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) OER programs. The ZTC program that we developed at Hostos was in early childhood education, and we developed OER textbooks for at least one section of all of the required courses — not only in education, but in all the other required subjects as well. This meant a student who wanted to graduate with an associate degree in early childhood education could do it with no textbook costs if they chose the sections well.
EJ: In addition to your MLS, you hold a PhD in theatre history and criticism. Do you see any overlap between your work in OER and your theater studies, and did you have any favorite roles?

LM: I’ve used my theatrical background in every job I’ve ever had. Especially when I was an instructor, but I also do a lot of presentations here. I think that one thing I’ll say, which actually came up during my interview here at MSU, is that theatre has informed my thinking about text and subtext. In my interview presentation, I talked about communication and about a particular approach to communication where you listen to detect the layers of meaning behind what someone is saying to you. I think that that line of thinking about text and subtext comes from my background in theater. I haven’t acted in a long time, but I think my most successful performance was in an all-female version of “Waiting for Gadot.” I played the role of Lucky. And it was just so far out there, but it was a really tight ensemble and really visually interesting.

EJ: With the kind of digital materials being produced within OER, do you see the potential for crossover with artificial intelligence (AI)?

LM: We’re currently partnering with people from the Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs) Program in the Department of Linguistics, Languages, and Cultures on a United States Department of Education grant. They have six projects that we’re working on right now, and one of the project authors emailed me recently because I had some conversations with them about the use of images that are copyrighted, all-rights-reserved, as opposed to openly licensed. They were going through the effort in some cases of trying to contact the copyright owner and get permission to use them. One of the questions they had was about policy around using AI-generated images in the meantime while they worked on securing permissions. I emailed Head of Collection Strategies Susan Kendall and learned that there’s a policy at MSU about the use of AI-generated material. Apparently the current precedent in the U.S. suggests that what is created by the generator is not copyrighted because a machine can’t own a copyright—only humans can. It is kind of fascinating how policy and legislation about AI is trying to catch up to current practice, which is always about ten steps ahead. We just don’t know how things will shake out in five or ten years. So, it is definitely going to keep coming up, because access to openly licensed content is the biggest challenge for people who are creating OER, particularly when it comes to images or other media.

EJ: Given your experience with OER at previous institutions, is there anything about the OER Program at MSU Libraries that sets it apart or that you find otherwise unique?

LM: Oh absolutely. And it has to do with the way that the previous OER Librarian, Regina Gong, designed the OER Program to provide multidimensional support for the faculty who are creating and producing these great OER resources. In my previous institution we hired part-time librarians to partner with faculty on their projects. But here the OER team works together collaboratively to define workflows and address challenges. It’s been really fantastic to help facilitate this teamwork. We have a great relationship with the Libraries’ really incredible accessibility compliance unit with Accessibility Coordinator Heidi Schroeder and her team working with Chandlee Marcyk-Taylor on the OER team. We also have Joshua Newman from Publishing Services, who spends a great deal of time and attention on formatting and copy editing. I step in and consult on things like finding openly licensed content, navigating copyright and dealing with the technology platforms. Julie Taylor from Publishing Services helps address technology issues too, but also works with a student employee to design cover images for the OERs. There is a lot of support here, and it’s set up in a different model—it’s almost like a publishing arm. Based on the inquiries I’ve received it seems the program already has a strong, positive reputation on campus. Anyone who would like to learn more about the Libraries’ OER Program can visit our online guide at https://lib.msu.edu/oer or email us at lib.oer@msu.edu.
Neil Romanosky was appointed Dean of MSU Libraries in Sept. 2023. In this role he provides strategic and administrative leadership for the MSU Libraries. He previously served as Dean of University Libraries at Ohio University, where his accomplishments included developing a strategic plan for the libraries with a focus on diversity, equity and inclusion; overseeing the alignment of the Ohio University Press and five regional campus libraries into the university libraries portfolio; working with campus partners to launch libraries-led, university-wide task forces on research data management and improving student study spaces; and spearheading Ohio University’s joining the HathiTrust, allowing for expanded university access to digital collections and other collaborative academic and research tools and services. He was previously Associate Chief Librarian for Science Research and Information and Director of Gerstein Science Information Centre at the University of Toronto Libraries. He also has held appointments at the New York University Health Sciences Library, the Network of the National Library of Medicine and Columbia University Libraries. Prior to his career in libraries, he spent a decade as an editor in technical and reference publishing; what inspired you to move from the publishing industry to librarianship?

NR: Although my time spent working in publishing was incredibly rewarding, I reached a point when I knew I was ready to explore a new career path. Ultimately, I wanted to change to a career that was more service-based, but which still tapped into my interests in information, communication and people. As an undergraduate, like many English majors, I worked in bookstores. Much of that time was spent at the information desk and managing customer orders for special and hard-to-find items that the stores didn’t normally carry. I loved helping people with their questions and finding a book or other resource that would meet their needs. Those experiences, coupled with a lifetime spent hanging out in libraries and bookstores, eventually led me to my career in libraries. I still see everything we do in libraries as driven by a commitment to service. In fact, service is the first principle mentioned in the American Library Association’s Code of Ethics, followed by our profession’s upholding of equally important principles like intellectual freedom, privacy, fairness and dignity of all people in their information-seeking behaviors. I see those commitments enacted every day by my colleagues at the MSU Libraries and across the profession. I am still so proud to say that I am a librarian, first and foremost. And at MSU, I also have the good fortune to still call upon my experiences from publishing, notably in my work with the MSU Press, which is part of the MSU Libraries organization.

EJ: You hold a number of advanced degrees, including a doctorate and a master’s in organizational development and change; how do you apply the concepts you learned earning these degrees to your work in librarianship?

NR: I have always followed my curiosity. While working at New York University, I first discovered the field of organizational development when I was pursuing a certificate in human resources. In those classrooms, full of professionals hailing from sectors as diverse as libraries, health care, finance and the military, it became clear to me that we were all navigating similar spaces when it came to helping people in organizations work through change. I found those common threads fascinating. I also saw immediate application of organizational development principles to my work in libraries, which have been undergoing their fair share of significant change for decades. My research in organizational development has focused on identity and change — understanding what an organization thinks it is and perhaps needs to be, compared to how it is understood and is perceived by its stakeholders. For me, as a library leader, living and applying this work means prioritizing relationships, asking good questions, listening before speaking, and constantly testing my and the organization’s assumptions about what we do and why we do it.

EJ: Your accomplishments as dean of university libraries at Ohio University included developing a strategic plan for the libraries with a focus on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). How do you see this work informing your approach to DEI initiatives at MSU Libraries?

NR: Diversity, equity and inclusion are central to everything we do in libraries. Collections, metadata, hiring practices, spaces, technology, services — the way we have traditionally thought about these and other components of libraries is predicated on a history that has privileged certain perspectives, identities and ways of knowing over others. In order to center DEI in our work, I believe we have to actively engage
with diverse communities, commit to iterative learning, and get specific about the ways in which DEI will be upheld in our work. At Ohio University, I charged the library staff in leading a strategic planning process informed by those principles, placing DEI at its core. They knocked it out of the park and took the libraries on an active learning journey around DEI that still informs the work there today. Coming to MSU, I was heartened to also see DEI as a priority in the Libraries’ strategic plan, placing inclusivity called out as a core value. Importantly, I also saw solid alignment between the MSU Libraries’ strategic plan and the University’s 2030 and DEI strategic plans. For those reasons, I’ve decided that we will be sticking with the Libraries’ strategic plan in the near term, focusing our efforts on building out new initiatives rather than creating a new strategy.

EJ: Your previous work at Ohio University included spearheading the university’s joining the HathiTrust, a large-scale library collaborative, and working with other library consortia and associations like OhioLINK and the Association of Research Libraries. Why is this kind of collaboration with other libraries important?

NR: I believe that collaboration is the name of the game in any academic research library. I like to think that it has been built into the DNA of how libraries work ever since interlibrary loan services started almost a century ago. In fact, I got my start in libraries working in interlibrary loan at Columbia University, so I like to think that collaboration is built into my library DNA as well. Working together, we are able to leverage our collective strengths to achieve what may be beyond our grasp as individual libraries and universities. I think this makes us unique within the profile of a university. HathiTrust, in which MSU Libraries is also a member, is a great example. Membership in HathiTrust provides libraries and users with access to digital collections, digitization infrastructure, accessibility services, digital scholarship tools and much more — a huge benefit to any university. MSU Libraries is also a member of the Association of Research Libraries, a group of the top research libraries in North America that gives MSU Libraries, among other things, a powerful voice in shaping information policy. We are also active at the state, regional and national levels in consortia like the libraries group of the Big Ten Academic Alliance, the Midwest Collaborative for Library Services and the Michigan Academic Library Association. Even our integrated library system, FOLIO, is an open source system that is developed and shaped for a global community of users, in part by the work of MSU Libraries faculty and staff. I see these collaborations as emblematic of the MSU Libraries upholding and living our land-grant identity — always working with a broader community of users in mind.
EJ: In a similar vein, you also worked with campus partners at Ohio University to launch libraries-led, university-wide task forces on research data management and improving student study spaces. Do you see potential opportunities for campus-wide collaboration at MSU?

NR: Absolutely! The MSU Libraries has a great history of working with partners across the University in many ways. What immediately comes to mind is how we’ve been reimagining our library spaces to prioritize people and connection. That work is rife with partnerships. For example, as of Fall 2023, the Main Library building became home to the Center for Teaching and Learning Innovation and the Office for Faculty and Academic Staff Development — two units that are great partners in work to which the Libraries is also committed. We are partnering with University Arts and Collections on a project to reimagine the North Plaza outside of the Main Library as a more vibrant community space. The new Main Library Starbucks is a fantastic collaborative project with Student Life and Engagement. In the research space, as the University continues to advance its bold research agenda as part of the MSU 2030 plan, I know that we will deepen our partnerships with MSU IT and the Office of Research and Innovation to ensure that faculty, graduate students and others have the supports they need to manage, share and preserve the data and publications stemming from their work. I’ve come to understand that the MSU Libraries is respected as a solid and productive partner across the University. I look forward to upholding and building on that position.

EJ: In addition to Ohio University, you’ve held librarianship appointments at multiple institutions, including University of Toronto Libraries, New York University Health Sciences Library and Columbia University. What sets MSU Libraries apart from these and other similar institutions where you’ve worked?

NR: I’ve had the good fortune to work at fantastic universities and libraries. I’ve learned new things every day and have developed a network of wonderful colleagues from each of those experiences. But, hands down, what sets MSU and its libraries apart is the vibrancy of our land-grant identity and mission. In talking with faculty and staff in the Libraries and across the University during my interview last spring, I was struck by just how alive the University’s commitment to its land-grant identity is. Time and again, people spoke with a sense of reverence and responsibility for their work at “Michigan’s state university,” that is, an institution that remains in service to the state broadly in everything that it does. This resonated with me. I believe strongly in the public purpose of higher education to create not only new knowledge and understanding, but active and informed citizens as well. MSU Libraries embraces that role in a powerful way.

EJ: MSU Libraries is a strong advocate for open access resources and lowering the costs of materials for students. Can you speak to the value of promoting open access at tier 1 research institutions like MSU?

NR: Both are critical. With respect to open access, MSU Libraries has been doing a great job in negotiating read-and-publish agreements with major publishers, which allows access to journal content in addition to enabling MSU authors to publish articles in open access format without having to pay fees to do so. This not only saves the University and our researchers money, but it allows MSU research to be broadly accessible to the global public — not locked behind a paywall. Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have all witnessed firsthand the importance of timely and broad access to evidence-based research. Federal funding agencies have indicated that by 2026 the publications and data associated with federally funded research must be immediately publicly accessible. For these reasons, the MSU Libraries will continue to broaden our supports for and partnerships in support of open access publishing, research data management and preservation, and other dimensions of open research.

Providing access to low- and no-cost (to the student) course materials has been and will remain a priority for MSU Libraries. I see this as especially important at a university like ours, which has for generations provided access to higher education for many students who are the first in their families to earn a college degree. The MSU Libraries has a dynamic Open Educational Resources (OER) Program, for example, where we enable subject experts to create openly available and shareable course materials as replacements for costly textbooks. We also offer very robust course reserves (including textbooks), subscriptions to large electronic textbook packages and regularly work with faculty to ensure that library resources are utilized in syllabi so that students don’t have to pay for course materials. I only see these efforts growing as we move forward.
EJ: You’ve noted your satisfaction with the current strategic plan that MSU Libraries has in place, but do you have any future projects or goals you’d like to see implemented at the Libraries?

NR: I’ve been taking a lot of time in these initial months at MSU to have conversations with people inside and outside of the Libraries. Based on what I’ve been learning and hearing, I do think we have the opportunity to advance some new initiatives in the months and years ahead. As one example, I would like to create a student advisory board for the Libraries, so that we have a formalized way to lift up student voices in the evolution of our spaces, collections and services. I’d also like to find ways to articulate the Libraries’ work and role in areas like media, data and civic literacy at the university, in parallel with our longstanding role as information literacy experts. I see these as increasingly critical areas of need for all students, regardless of their field of study. Finally, I’d like to continue to find ways to celebrate and promote the work of our outstanding Libraries faculty and staff, so that the unique value they bring to the University’s mission continues to be understood and appreciated. Part of the latter is also ensuring that we, as an organization, prioritize ways to connect and celebrate our work together. Recently we had a celebration of our fantastic student employees, where many people from the Libraries came together for a few hours of conversation over good food, board games and great company. It was a really special day. I want to continue to find those types of opportunities for us to connect with one another.

EJ: As a relatively new MSU community member, have you found any specific areas in the greater East Lansing region that you enjoy (outside, of course, of the Libraries)?

NR: My husband and I are so happy to be able to call East Lansing our new home. It has been a hectic couple of months as we’ve been settling into life and work here, but we have been having a great time exploring the options available in our own backyard here in the Capital Region and at MSU. We absolutely love the programming at the Wharton Center for Performing Arts and student performances at the University, and just recently checked out the beautiful MSU Broad Art Museum. We also went to our first MSU men’s basketball game and had an absolute blast. (For what it’s worth, I also think Sparty is the best mascot around.) I’m really looking forward to exploring Michigan more as we head into spring and summer. I’ve become increasingly fascinated by the beauty and history of the Great Lakes in recent years. I can’t wait to see some of the dunes I’ve been hearing about!

EJ: As someone who made a career in books, do you have any favorites? Similarly, how do you spend your free time?

NR: Oh boy, that’s a tough one. Recently I’ve been rediscovering John Irving, an author I was quite taken with in high school and college. I really appreciate the poignancy, humor and deep character development in his writing. I’ve also been finding that it’s fun to reconnect with and appreciate the same author or works at different points in my life, from different perspectives. I had that experience re-reading “The Catcher in the Rye” recently — a book I first read when I was about 13 and have revisited every 10-15 years since. I can remember thinking when I first read it how the main character, Holden Caulfield, seemed so much older and experienced than I was! In my free time, I like to swim, travel and spend as much time as I can chatting with my husband and hanging out with our two dogs and two cats. There’s never enough time for everything I’d like to do in any given day. But that just means I always have a great to-do list at the ready! ☀️
This past year MSU Libraries welcomed Elizabeth Demers as director of the Michigan State University Press. MSU Press Sales and Marketing Manager Nicole Utter interviewed Demers on her experience at MSU, future press initiatives and athletic pursuits. Elizabeth Demers joined Michigan State University Press as director in October 2023, completing a full-circle journey that brings her back to where she started her publishing career as a graduate assistant. Demers comes to MSU from the University of Michigan Press, where she served as editorial director since 2019. She also previously held positions at Johns Hopkins University Press, Quarto Publishing, Potomac Books, Praeger-Greenwood and University of Nebraska Press. Demers received undergraduate degrees in English and French and a master’s in comparative literature at MSU, as well as a doctorate in US history. She also obtained an MBA from the University of Maryland University College. In addition to her professional accomplishments, Demers is a National Club Curling champion and USA Senior Women’s Curling silver medalist (2022 and 2023), curling out of the Detroit Curling Club in Ferndale, Michigan.

NU: What’s it like to come back to MSU?

ED: I love being back. It’s where I fell in love with publishing. I arrived at MSU for the first time as an undergrad in 1986 and left to go work as the history editor at University of Nebraska Press in 2002. Since then a great deal has changed, both for me and on campus. However, MSU is and always has been a very welcoming place — the energy and spirit have remained the same.

One of the biggest changes for the MSU Press in those years is that we now report to MSU Libraries instead of directly to Research. This changes our operations in some ways. You can see that the focus of the Libraries has also changed from when I was first at MSU. When you walk into the Main Library today, you see the focus on collaboration and technology. The Libraries is utilizing technology to find solutions for creativity, research and the discoverability of information. The press is thrilled to be a part of this effort.

NU: You have been involved with MSU Press for many years, first as an intern and later as an editor for our journals. From your many years observing and cheering on the press, what were some of the titles that we produced that you found exciting?

ED: “Mes Confitures: The Jams and Jellies of Christine Ferber” is one of my favorites, and it’s one of our top-selling titles. It’s just fun, and it’s really a book for everybody, especially folks who are interested in cooking or French culture. If you haven’t cooked out of that book, you really should; the flavor combinations are unique and different.

NU: You helped MSU acquire that book when you were a graduate student, right?

ED: Well, I met the agent at a conference, signed the book, and I helped with production. It really is a good book! Christine Ferber’s flavor combinations are so amazing. We had a bake-off at the press in December celebrating that book and its sequel, “Mes Tartes: The Sweet and Savory Tarts of Christine Ferber.” Everybody enjoyed it and followed the spirit of Ferber’s work, making substitutions and still coming up with great flavors and food.

NU: You helped MSU acquire that book when you were a graduate student, right?

ED: We have had some outstanding books in the last year or two. I wrote my dissertation on Detroit and Michilimackinac, so of course “Great Women of Mackinac, 1800–1950” is very exciting to me. I was happy to see that book win a Michigan
Notable Book Award. It is a fantastic resource about the women of our state. I’m also excited about “Kenya’s Running Women” as I am a runner myself. I’m about to run the Tokyo and London Marathons to complete my Abbott Six Star World Marathon Majors series.

I also want to highlight “Michigan Salvage: The Fiction of Bonnie Jo Campbell.” Bonnie Jo Campbell is having a moment right now. She is a National Book Award nominee and her newest book, “The Waters,” is creating a lot of buzz. She was just on the “Today Show,” and her book was one of Oprah Daily’s Most Anticipated Books of 2024. The MSU Press book of critical essays about her work is a way to experience her writing deeply, both for general readers and people who think about modern literature.

NU: If you could put together a dream list for MSU Press, what would it look like?

ED: I love our Indigenous studies list. It has always had a Great Lakes focus, and I would love to build on the great work that we have already published. Former MSU Press editor Julie Loehr built that list in an exciting way. We are going to work from that foundation. Our environmental studies books also tie into that list nicely and is an area where I would like to expand.

I think we have the top regional list in the state. I would love to see our regional list continue to pull in history and topics exciting to the people of Michigan.

NU: If you could look ahead five years, what would you hope to see happening at MSU Press in terms of acquisitions, book distribution, journals and the press’ position in the Association of University Presses (AUP)?

ED: I’m currently writing a three- to five-year strategic plan that will get the press up to the level that it needs to be at to represent a top tier research university. The plan focuses on books and journals and lays out our commitment to excellence. We will find the best books that we can find, and we will grow our prominence. Our journals program has also been around for a very long time. We are a destination place for people who are publishing new and exciting short-form work. We are looking to build our campus partnerships for these journals nationally and internationally. Journals work in tandem with our books program, giving scholars multiple ways to publish their research.

We are excited to be active in the AUP community. Our staff is traveling to the AUP annual conference in June to give a panel, and I would like to see us have the ability to do more. I want us to bring the MSU vision of excellence and thoughtfulness to a broader world.

Of course, our five-year plan also includes open access. This will be true in journals and books. We are looking for additional opportunities for open access in both our book and journals programs.

NU: What are some ways that MSU Press can be at the forefront of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives?

ED: MSU Press has historically published in disciplines and areas of studies that are at the heart of DEI questions: Indigenous studies, African studies, rhetoric, and, more locally, our Discovering the Peoples of Michigan series. These have long been prominent vehicles for thinking about how the different communities in the state of Michigan contribute to the incredible culture in our state. We have a great base to build on, and we plan to grow this list thoughtfully.

Open access is another way that we can level the playing field, both in terms of accessibility and in terms of being able to publish people who don’t work at wealthy universities. We need to create a more equitable platform for users and researchers.

NU: Can you share a little bit about your very interesting sporting career?

ED: I curl. I run. I just recently picked up downhill skiing. I also golf. I don’t do any of those things at a professional level, except maybe curling. I went to Senior Nationals and won silver medals two years in a row in 2022 and 2023. My team also won the U.S. National Club Championship in 2020. This last weekend our team came in second at another national event. I was not an athletic child. I stayed in my room reading, which probably inspired my love of publishing.

I picked up running in my late twenties and early thirties because it’s an interesting mental and physical challenge and because I really like being outdoors. I know this might sound corny, but running and curling teach us so much about life. They both show you how to overcome obstacles when things go wrong and to continue to learn and grow every day. Running is more about individual effort and pushing yourself, but curling teaches you how to work with people. Everybody’s part matters, and nobody is more important than anybody else. And I’m convinced that if you can run a marathon or if you can build a great curling team, you can do anything in every other part of your life.
Chavez collection continues legacy of excellence in Chicano resources

When you enter the Cesar E. Chavez Collection area on the first floor of Michigan State University’s Main Library, you might not realize that you’re standing in the middle of a student movement. Established by MSU alumnus and librarian emeritus Diana Rivera in 1995, the Chavez collection was founded in the wake of the campus-wide campaign urging the university to support the United Farm Worker’s Grape Boycott. This campaign was led by chapter student group MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan) and called for the university to support its Chicano and Latino students who came from farmworker families by joining the boycott. The MSU Office of the President and MEChA came to an agreement that included recognizing the boycott by creating the Chavez collection in honor of the eponymous United Farm Worker leader.

In speaking about the formation of the Chavez collection today, Rivera continues to emphasize the work of the students as a cornerstone of the collection she established to foreground Chicano and Puerto Rican studies. According to Rivera, when the collection was created in 1995, much of the curation was done by students eager to make available research reflecting the areas in which Chavez himself spent his life working, such as labor, education, non-violence, diversity and culture. The impetus for the collection itself, however, had much earlier roots in the student activism of the 1970s, specifically during the grape and lettuce boycotts that led to the largest farm worker strike in U.S. history. Rivera herself was active in these demonstrations here on campus, as she was completing her undergraduate degree in racial and ethnic studies through the College of Urban Development (CUD). Established in 1973, the CUD was, according to a college mission statement from the University Archives and Historical Collections, meant to identify and address issues stemming from racial and ethnic discrimination and prejudice. It comprised two units: the Department of Urban and Metropolitan Studies and the Department of Racial and Ethnic Studies. Since the college was still relatively new in Rivera’s senior year, she said she found herself essentially creating her own syllabus.

“I had to make up a lot of my own coursework because I enrolled in a new college that had a new department, and there weren’t a lot of courses developed yet. I took independent studies from the faculty there, and I created a lot of my own research areas to study and work on.”

This innovative approach is one that Rivera continued to deploy as she went on from MSU to earn her Master of Science in Information degree from University of Michigan in 1978. Her first son Diego was born in November of that year, and Rivera brought him with her to class for the duration of the one-year program. Upon completion of the program, Rivera’s husband Pedro took an internship in Arizona, and the family followed him westward. In Arizona, Rivera learned that she was three credits shy of the graduation requirement at University of Michigan and enrolled in an independent study course that she completed at the Pima Community College Library. The family returned to Michigan in 1982, which is when Rivera applied to an opening at the MSU Libraries as assistant to the head of what was then the humanities area. Rivera eventually found herself in the Urban Policy and Planning branch of the Main Library, which is where she was able to plant the seed for her first MSU Libraries legacy: the Map Library now located on 2-East.

“I was working with the planners and landscape architects within the Urban Policy and Planning collections, and I told the director, Richard Chapin, that we should have a map library and named some Big 10 schools that had one,” Rivera said. Chapin agreed, and the collection began to grow, albeit within the confines of the art collections in what was then known as
Rivera was interviewed by Gustavo Valdés, CNN en Español reporter, in August 2019, for the feature “El sóftbol ayuda a unir a la comunidad latina en Michigan.”

From left: Sonya Hernandez, then-Assistant Director of the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Grand Rapids Community College; Breanna Escamilla (MSU Library student staff); Lupe Ramos-Montigny (Michigan State Board of Education member); and Rivera in the Special Collection Patriarch Room. Photo by Leslie Behm.

Rivera with friend and mentor Dolores Huerta, President of the Dolores Huerta Foundation, co-founder of the United Farm Workers Association and a 2012 recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, in the Chavez collection alcove in 2018. Photo by Pete Cookingham.
Rivera was head of the Map Library when she started the Chavez collection, which she again says was made possible by the work of students. She recalls that there were about 10 students and staff who were particularly invested in assisting with the establishment of the collection. These students were primarily Latino, some of whom had overlapping involvement with MECha, with a few non-Latino students doing work within the online library catalog.

“These students were looking through old catalogs that I had received over the years and had just filed,” Rivera said. “They were going through catalogs and finding titles of books, pamphlets, reports, and what would be known as “zines” now, and flyers, posters, recordings, video recordings, and audio recordings to bring in to the Chicano and Puerto Rican library collection. There was a lot of investment by the students.”

Given Rivera’s history of student support, it seems natural that the person who succeeded her as head of the Chavez collection began her career at the MSU Libraries as a student worker. Andrea Salazar McMillan now oversees the Chavez collection in her role as the Chicano & Latino Studies Librarian, which includes curating and developing collections in the area of Chicano & Latino Studies for the Stephen O. Murray & Keelung Hong Special Collections. McMillan got her start at the MSU Libraries as a student worker in 2007 but didn’t officially meet Rivera until five years later. During that time McMillan graduated and was hired into the Interlibrary Services unit of the MSU Libraries, which is when she began chatting with Rivera around the Libraries.

“She would ask me about what I was doing and what my plans were, and I told her I was going to grad school for librarianship, and she was like, that’s awesome,” McMillan said. “I feel like she might have been dropping hints because she started saying stuff about how great it would be for a Latina to work with the Chavez collection when she left in the future and things like that.”

After McMillan graduated from Wayne State University with her Master’s in Library and Information Science, she was accepted into the first cohort of MSU Libraries’ Residency Program in 2018. Residency interviews included a candidate presentation segment, and McMillan said that Rivera’s presence in the audience during her presentation gave her a sense of relief.

“It felt good to see her, since it was incredibly nerve-wracking having to present in front of colleagues. My presentation was on critical librarianship and academic libraries, and I was specifically pointing out the things that the residency was
really aiming to help change. Like the fact that there’s not a lot of librarians of color in the field — even though there have been all kinds of diversity and pipeline programs for 30 years, it’s still very much a white space. Talking about what it looks like when we’re thinking about these kinds of ideas and representation in different aspects of librarianships. And I just felt Diana nodding her head. It was very comforting to know she was totally in my corner.”

McMillan said that it was nearer to Rivera’s retirement when she really got to know both Rivera and the work she was doing. After Rivera retired in 2019, the two kept in touch, and Rivera continued to encourage McMillan to consider working with the Chavez collection. Eventually McMillan became curious and reached out to former Head of Special Collections Peter Berg and former Associate Dean Steve Sowards, who was then overseeing the Special Collections unit. Berg and Sowards readily agreed that McMillan was a good candidate to fill Rivera’s former position as curator of the collection. McMillan was officially named curator of the Chavez collection in April 2019.

“Diana Rivera was uniquely prepared to develop the Chavez collection, as both an experienced academic librarian and a member of the community, at MSU and in greater Lansing,” Sowards noted. “Her contacts and skills combined to launch a successful collection, and today Andrea McMillan brings similar strengths to the ongoing work with this intensively used part of the Libraries.”

After McMillan became curator of the Chavez collection, she “learned that the collection isn’t just the Chavez browsing collection but extends to the Special Collections and its related archives as well.” According to McMillan, Rivera created an overlap between the Chavez collection and the other larger Libraries units in acquiring materials that could be classified as both Chavez and archival collection resources. This acquisition strategy resulted in a budget surplus that allowed for the growth of a supplemental primary research collection that still lives in Special Collections today. McMillan said these types of resources are especially important because of the Chicano and Latino Studies Program offered at MSU. The MSU CLS Program was established in 1997, largely in response to 1994’s MEChA-led protest, and is currently one of only eight doctoral programs in the U.S.

“Diana very early on recognized the importance, value and critical need to have primary source materials,” McMillan said. “And supporting researchers, especially now that we have a program like this. So she was doing this before that program was created, but I feel like she just saw so far ahead into the future — looking outward, you know, versus thinking about what’s just going on now.”

Although Rivera employed a forward-facing perspective as head of the Chavez collection, the items she noted as some of favorites within the collection have their roots in the past. One of those items is a framed UFW flag that was donated by Julio Guerrero that now resides in the José F. Treviño Chicana/Latina Activism Collection, which was established by Rivera as a separate archival collection in 2000. Rivera also cited the newsletters from what was then known as the Office of Minority Student Affairs under then-Assistant Provost Lee June as being unique items in the Chavez collection. Rivera herself donated these newsletters to the collection, explaining that during the time they were circulating the newsletters “that was our email.” The items that hold the most meaning for Rivera however, are the shirts that she and her husband donated from their days participating in the women’s and men’s softball teams formed by the Chicano Students for Progressive Action (CHISPA).

“When I first started at MSU, the students from CHISPA were the most Chicano folks I had been around other than my family, and I come from a big family. The back and forth that we got from each other in talking about issues — the social, the political, the cultural — meant a lot. The guys got together and started a men’s softball team, and then the women got together and started a women’s softball team. I kept my shirt for years, but I didn’t know why. And then I knew why—I donated it. I donated my husband’s as well; I have a picture of him when he graduated from undergrad at our apartment on Cherry Lane, cutting his graduation cake, and he has that shirt on. Those two items in particular are special to me just because of where we wore them, what they meant to us.”

MSU Libraries patrons can view these items and more by visiting the Cesar E. Chavez Collection on the first floor of the Main Library’s West Wing or by contacting collection curator Andrea McMillan. Patrons can also access the Murray & Hong Special Collections materials in the MSU Libraries’ Reading Room by appointment at lib.msu.edu/murray-hong-spc.
The MSU Libraries recently saw the launch of two large digital projects that help advance our values of equity and accessibility in providing research platforms to our community. In September 2023, the Turfgrass Information Center announced that the Turfgrass Information File database — a cooperative project with the United States Golf Association — was made publicly available. In late 2023, our Harmful Language Remediation Working Group was featured in several local media channels for their work in addressing harmful language within the Libraries’ public catalog and other resource descriptions on campus that provide access to both digital and print resources. Read on for more information on how these projects help promote equal access to information through digital discovery.
The Turfgrass Information File (TGIF) database, which was previously accessible only via paid subscription and usually at an institutional or organizational level, became openly accessible in Sept. 2023. The release of the publicly accessible TGIF database coincided with the 40-year anniversary of the partnership between the United States Golf Association (USGA) and the MSU Libraries. When the database initiative began in 1983, the priority was to first provide those in the turfgrass sciences expedient access to contemporary literature; the ultimate goal was to expand to published and unpublished materials reporting on all aspects of turfgrass and its management regardless of sector, context, geography, language or age. The USGA provided the seed money to fund this project, with the first record being entered into the TGIF database on Sept. 10, 1984. In 2019, the database saw its 300 thousandth record entered.

“The development of what would become the Turfgrass Information File was a specific goal of the USGA Green Section’s original research committee, and the MSU Libraries has done an exceptional job advancing it,” said Cole Thompson, USGA Director, Turfgrass and Environmental Research. “Today, TGIF has become the go-to database for people interested in turfgrass literature. I can’t imagine life without it, which reinforces both its status and how visionary the original development effort was. Allowing public access of TGIF advances our original goals, and the USGA is appreciative to collaborate with MSU Libraries on the effort.”

MSU Turfgrass Research Professor John N. “Trey” Rogers III expressed enthusiasm about the database and its move to open access. “The TGIF database has been a tremendous resource for anyone in the turf industry, and certainly a source of pride for me and my colleagues during my 35 plus years on the MSU Turf faculty,” he said. “To watch this vision of Peter Cookingham and others take shape and become the quintessential source for all turf information has been both amazing and gratifying. Open access will only enhance the reputation of the TIC at MSU, and we could not be happier.”

The TGIF database indexes material from a wide variety of sources including governments, higher learning institutions, professional organizations and private publishers. Materials include articles from peer-reviewed publications, technical reports and conference proceedings, trade and professional publications, local professional newsletters, popular magazines, monographs, theses and dissertations, fact sheets and brochures, images, software, and web documents. The majority of the database uses English-language materials, but it does include non-English resources. As of August 2023, the database comprised 323,469 records, 67 percent of which link to the full text of the item. According to Elisabeth Mabie, Head of the Turfgrass Information Center, the number of full-text resources in the database is significant.

“For turfgrass professionals who cannot regularly visit a research library, access to full-text turfgrass research and other pertinent turf literature can be a challenge,” Mabie said. “However, these are often the individuals who utilize these materials the most. With two-thirds of TGIF database records linking to the full-text of the item, this means many thousands of records link directly to content, saving valuable time and effort that would otherwise be spent locating physical copies for personal use.”

The TGIF database can be accessed at https://tic.msu.edu/tgif.
The primary role of the HLRWG is to facilitate and track harmful language remediation projects across the MSU Libraries. Work that HLRWG members have accomplished on an internal level includes replacing the problematic LCSH terms beginning with “Indians of…” (e.g., “Indians of North America”) with the local subject heading “Indigenous peoples of…” (e.g., “Indigenous peoples of North America”) for all physical books starting in April 2022. The HLRWG also receives support in this work from staff in the Cataloging and Metadata Services Unit, who are making concerted efforts to propose updates to these knowledge organization systems.

On the national level, the HLRWG has noted the successful efforts of MSU Libraries Cataloger Michael Erickson in adding a set of classification numbers for asexuality topics to the LCC. While “Asexuality” and “Asexual people” were already subject headings, the addition of specific classification numbers means that materials on asexuality topics can be classed and shelved together rather than within more general classification numbers for sexual behaviors and attitudes.

MSU Libraries Associate Dean of Diversity, Inclusion and Organizational Development Alexandra Rivera, who serves as an advisor to the Harmful Language Remediation Working Group, said the accomplishment of these initiatives is significant to the group’s overall mission. “The library metadata and cataloging community is a collaborative one that seeks to improve its practice through engagement with individual libraries,” Rivera said. “This work is important to ensure our users see themselves respectfully represented within our resources and to make them more easily accessible. I am excited for the impact my MSU colleagues are making through their remediation efforts and national engagement. This initiative is directly in alignment with the Libraries’ core values of inclusivity, user engagement, staff empowerment, partnership and expertise.”

Current projects that the working group is facilitating include a pilot using the Homosaurus, an international linked data vocabulary of LGBTQ+ terms, to better understand how to apply more modern alternative vocabularies to older catalog records. The pilot will focus on changing the outdated descriptive terms related to transgender people within the Libraries’ Stephen O. Murray and Keelung Hong Special Collections materials. The HLRWG is also working to address the need for subject heading terms related to the Armenian genocide denial in our library catalog. In addition to specific projects, the working group provides training opportunities for MSU Libraries staff on inclusive description. The group is also committed to staying current on trends within the larger library field and considering meaningful ways the MSU Libraries can continue participating in the larger professional conversation.

The HLRWG has developed a publicly available form that can be used to report instances of potentially harmful language in the MSU Libraries catalog. This form is available at https://bit.ly/HLRWG.
EJ: Do you have any specific goals for the collection within your position? Relatedly, is there anything you think that MSU Libraries does especially well in terms of our African studies collections?

CM: One of my primary goals for this year is to review African Studies Collection Development Approval Plans. The plans were last reviewed between 2017 and 2019. My predecessors did an excellent job in curating premier collections in African history, political science, education and social science disciplines. I am reviewing the disciplines and research focus areas stipulated in the existing Africana Studies Approval Plans to bring them on par with new developments regarding teaching and research in African studies by faculty and the new Institute of Ubuntu Thought and Practice (IUTP). Additionally, Africa has significantly changed the way it is engaging with the rest of the world. Climate change and climate solutions are new realities impacting the world today. We face food and human insecurity, and there are challenges related to access to water and energy, etc. These are global challenges that need global solutions. Comparative transregional studies on how climate change is affecting Africa, the Caribbean, Latin and North America, etc., are warranted. The Alliance for African Partnership at MSU is catalyzing research on transregional studies through Partnerships for Innovative Research in Africa (PIRA) grants. The content of the revised approval plans shall reflect the ongoing collaborative teaching and research initiatives in Africa, African partnerships in transregional studies, and how Africa is engaging the world, among other current and new developments. We shall continue to maintain premier status collections and strategically upgrade them using the regular annual collection development budget.

Chenjerai Mabhiza

continued from p. 5
In the twenty-five years that Jyotsna Singh has remained a fixture in the Michigan State University's College of Arts & Letters, she has been devoted to ensuring that students recognize the importance of primary source material in their study of English literature and culture. Singh, whose retirement from her position as professor in the Department of English was celebrated on December 1 with a campus-wide symposium at the International Center, is a lifelong library advocate who cites her experience with the Bodleian Libraries of Oxford (UK) and the British Library in the early 1990s as being especially formative.

“In these early forays, I found that the pre-1800 books in these libraries — on history, literature, religion and travel — were crucial to my research for my first monograph, ‘Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues: “Discoveries” of India in the Language of Colonialism’ [1996], and continued to inform my subsequent research on Shakespeare, empire and colonialism,” Singh noted. “My abiding fascination with early texts was strengthened by several library fellowships I received later at the Folger Shakespeare Library, the John Carter Brown Library and back to the Bodleian in 2019 on an Oxford fellowship. For me, libraries, especially for rare books, continue to be magical places — often sharing discoveries with communities of scholars in my field.”

Singh’s emphasis on academic interaction reaches well beyond her own research. In addition to the impact she’s made in teaching early modern literature and culture at both the graduate and undergraduate levels, she is renowned on campus for the relationships she builds with both her colleagues and students, some of whom offered remarks on Singh’s career at the symposium. MSU Libraries Curator of Rare Books and Special Collections Cataloger Tad Boehmer has worked closely with Singh since he started in the Stephen O. Murray & Keelung Hong Special Collections in 2017. Boehmer, who says that he and Singh became “fast friends,” was one of those colleagues who spoke to the lasting impact Singh has had on the greater MSU community.

“The symposium was a day full of lectures and celebrating Jyotsna,” Boehmer said. “One of her mentors from graduate school at Syracuse came and spoke, along with some current and former grad students, as well as friends and colleagues from across the country. The day was such a testament to her involvement with people from all fields and her mentorship to peers as well as students. It showed what a great supporter she is of people in a variety of fields and across all different disciplines.”
The symposium is also where Singh officially announced her generous endowment to the MSU Libraries. The Jyotsna G. Singh Endowment in Early Modern Studies: Race, Empire, and Global Connections will primarily support an annual public event on the early modern collections at the Libraries. Funds from this gift will also be used to support Libraries exhibits, classroom projects, pop-up events and further programming related to the early modern period at the MSU Libraries, including digital resources and print materials. Its proposed outcomes will open up research and teaching opportunities in multiple areas such as the history of pre-modern book production, circulation and provenance (ownership); early printed editions of literary works by Shakespeare and his contemporaries; early European voyages of discovery, histories of trade, colonization and enslavement; and early Christian (Anglo)-Muslim encounters, among others.

Singh’s decision to place her gift with the Libraries came from her desire to highlight the importance of historical context not only in research into the past, but also in understanding present-day societal issues. “By giving this endowment, I hope to make people aware of the earlier periods and why they are relevant to our current concerns,” Singh explained. “Increasingly, it seems we no longer read historically; instead, we read in a very presentist frame, which is good in a sense. But I think you can better study those contemporary social concerns and issues when you have a historical context. To hold in your hands a book published 400-500 years ago is a magical moment in itself. And then to observe annotations and other marks on the paper, which tell an important history in itself. Who was the first buyer? How many hands did this book pass through? Did women own and buy books in the 16th and 17th centuries? Were book owners typically aristocratic European men, who could also be early colonizers?”

MSU Libraries Director of Development Caitlyn Perry Dial noted the significance of Singh’s gift in bringing attention to the early modern materials in Special Collections. “At MSU Libraries, we have several funds which support the preservation and care of our collections,” Dial said. “We have very few that are centered on their promotion, ensuring that our campus community knows about them and learns from them. Dr. Singh’s endowment, like the Arts MSU initiative, will ensure that every MSU student will have the opportunity to enjoy and appreciate the diverse collection of texts and artistry in our collection, while also understanding their place in our collective history.”

Singh believes that the annual event and other activities made possible by her endowment will draw scholars and students to Special Collections to experience these types of histories — not only from MSU, but potentially from other institutions in the Midwest and beyond as well. This dedication to historical context is fitting for the Shakespeare scholar, whose work in early modern literature began with a dissertation on the bard followed by her first coauthored book, “The Weyward Sisters: Shakespeare and Feminist Politics” (1994). Subsequent key publications include “A Companion to the Global Renaissance” (ed., 2009 & 2021) and a recent monograph, “Shakespeare and Postcolonial Theory” (2019). It was her work on Shakespeare that led her research to expand more historically, with Singh becoming interested in how the words of the English writer moved across the continents. She questioned why people in India would be interested in reading him, and why she herself was taught Shakespeare in school in India. Through this kind of historical inquiry her work shifted to travel narratives on colonialism and empire, which, according to Singh, was not a common field of research at the time. She addresses this distinctiveness specifically in a 2020 article published in Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies titled “Confessions: The Consolations of Literature,” noting that when she came to the U.S. to do her postdoctoral work she found that “English studies at the time was an Anglo-centric world and not particularly welcoming to me.” Singh explains that she was concurrently experiencing questions about
her interest in Shakespeare studies, and, more directly, why she wasn’t focusing on a more “Indian subject matter.” This line of inquiry, she notes in her article, “led me to journey back to the disseminations of Shakespeare in colonial India, and to reflect on how and why today we may consider these works as ‘universal,’ being disseminated among former colonial subjects” (347).

Singh also faced similar questions about her credibility as an early modern scholar when she began her career in higher education. After graduating with both a master’s and postdoctoral degree in English from Syracuse University and following a stint working at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, she found a home with MSU, where she accepted an assistant professorship position in 1998.

“I had loyalty to the English Department at Michigan State because they hired me, gave me a promotion early in my career and acknowledged the value of my work,” Singh said. “Our department has great students, and the university overall has a wonderful global environment.”

“Initially, I was not encouraged to do Renaissance studies in the profession,” Singh continued. “But today, my research areas of interest as reflected in this endowment on ‘Race, Empire, and Global Connections’ are dominant in shaping early modern studies.”

It was during Singh’s time at MSU that she also found a home in the Libraries’ Special Collections. After spending hours poring through archives in her own research, Singh was curious about the holdings at MSU. She recalled the basement room that the Special Collections formerly occupied and says that despite the time spent exploring the materials, it took her years to fully uncover the resources the collection offers.

“Part of every early modern course I taught at MSU, both graduate and undergraduate, included visiting rare books in Special Collections,” Singh said. “These courses gave students a historical context, as well as the experience of sitting in a library — of perusing old books, which stir their imagination. And frankly, I didn’t even discover all the pre-1800 books we had here until about 10 years ago. I found that the Special Collections had some very, very expensive collections on early modern travel narratives, which is what I was working on. So I started suggesting and ordering books on topics my endowment now also supports, like early modern race, empire, globalization, histories of Islam and gender studies. It is really exciting to see a student totally taken up by, say, an old atlas, a book about herbs and plants — including poisons — or accounts of Africa and Asia going as far back as the medieval period.”

Singh’s former student, Anna Jeffries, noted that her introduction to the Libraries’ Special Collections in a 2022 graduate seminar taught by Singh was especially formative. “Dr. Singh’s seminar introduced me to the Special Collections and reignited my passion to pursue a career in books,” Jeffries said. “Even though I was an outsider as a new student at MSU in a STEM master’s program, Dr. Singh welcomed me and opened the door to a wonderful new world. Now, even though it has been over a year since I participated in her seminar, Dr. Singh continues to take an interest in what I do and has been an invaluable mentor and, dare I say, friend. I have also remained engaged with the Special Collections, working closely with the curator in a variety of contexts such as Dr. Liam Matthew Brockey’s ‘History of the Book’ seminar and my own independent work. Looking forward, I hope to still benefit from Dr. Singh’s guidance as I plan to obtain my Ph.D. in Digital Humanities with a focus on the early modern archive.”
Some of the materials Singh cites in the Special Collections as having made her “jump” are the travel narratives, specifically five volumes of “Purchas his Pilgrimes” by Samuel Purchas, an anthology published in 1625-26. These particularly caught her attention, she said, because she had become familiar with Purchas during her time at the Newberry Library Renaissance Center, where she hosted workshops on early modern Anglo-Muslim archives in 2011 and 2012. As a Shakespeare scholar and former Folger Shakespeare Library Visiting Fellow, she also took notice of the MSU Libraries’ collection of his works, particularly “Mr. William Shakespear’s comedies, histories, and tragedies,” (1685), also known as the “Fourth Folio.” Singh additionally noted “The herball; or Generall historie of plantes” (1636) by John Gerard; the “Geographie blaviane” atlas (1667) by Joan Blaeu; and “The Turkish history” (1687-1700) by Richard Knolles as standout materials in the MSU Special Collections.

Head of Special Collections Leslie McRoberts was thrilled about the future impacts Singh’s endowment promises for the early modern materials holdings. “At the Murray & Hong Special Collections, our early modern works set the stage for the greater whole of the popular culture collection, providing a deep contextualization of our current selves in the contemporary world,” McRoberts said. “The past and the present continue to intertwine themselves with one another; our recent acquisition of Richard Hakluyt’s ‘The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation’ [2nd ed., 1599-1600] emphasizes deep exploration for empire building while simultaneously promoting the expansion of trade. Hakluyt is considered a significant figure in the foundation of the British Empire. This title is exciting and a significant acquisition among the aforementioned holdings, and it aligns perfectly with Singh’s scholarship as well as the scholarship of others in the field.”

Current MSU doctoral candidate April Best is another former student of Singh who cited her experience with the Special Collections under Singh as an instrumental part of her graduate coursework. “My work with the Special Collections at MSU Libraries [in her 2022 graduate seminar] was one of the most valuable experiences of my graduate studies,” Best said. “I spent the most time examining and engaging with ‘almanacks’ from the 17th century and Samuel Purchas’s five-volume ‘Pilgrimes.’ Sitting with the physical texts and considering their materiality impacted my research in visceral ways. I thought about the long history of others who held and looked at the texts as well as their provenance and the way they arrived at MSU. I still think about the early modern ecological imagination because of my work with the texts, and in another life — or maybe at some point in the future — I would pursue that research.”

While Singh has built her career on, among other things, travel narratives across the globe, she maintains a firm belief that there is also value in staying in place, especially for scholars who have started building professional homes at institutions like MSU. “We live in a very competitive society, and the advice people always give younger scholars is to keep applying to other jobs, try to get other offers. When I came to Michigan State, a lot of people assumed that I would try to leave MSU. Instead, I worked with some great colleagues to bring in international students and build a global department — I helped to make our department grow and thrive. And now, in leaving the Libraries endowment, I can continue to help build at MSU.”

As Singh made her home with MSU, she said that the Libraries always provided a special sort of repository. Singh noted that she always felt supported in her work by the “amazing administrators and curators of the Rare Books Special Collections, from Peter Berg to Pat Olson, and currently Leslie McRoberts and Tad Boehmer.” She is particularly excited that her endowed collection will be housed in the new East Wing space on the third floor of the Main Library with the rest of the Stephen O. Murray and Keelung Hong Special Collections in the MSU Libraries. “MSU Libraries have a great leadership in the new dean, Dr. Neil Romanosky, and Head of Development, Dr. Caitlyn Dial. And in this list I would also like to include the former dean of the Libraries, Joseph Salem. It was Dean
Salem’s initial support and encouragement that led me decide to give my endowed gift to the MSU Libraries. I am grateful to him.”

In closing this interview, Singh provided one final reflection: "Giving and shaping this endowment has been an enriching journey for me. And I hope the events and activities of the endowment will continue to open up new and exciting journeys for students, researchers and academics, as well as for members of the larger community." My love of books and intellectual pursuits developed at home with my parents in India — Mr. and Mrs. M.S. Gujral. A special thanks to my niece, Shreya Dua, who studied the classics in Oxford as a graduate student. It was she who urged me to give a gift to the MSU Libraries for an area of my own research. Finally, this is also for my younger niece Rhea Anand — a burgeoning intellectual!”

“My work with the Special Collections at MSU Libraries was one of the most valuable experiences of my graduate studies. I spent the most time examining and engaging with ‘almanacks’ from the 17th century and Samuel Purchas’ five-volume ‘Pilgrimes.’ Sitting with the physical texts and considering their materiality impacted my research in visceral ways. I thought about the long history of others who held and looked at the texts as well as their provenance and the way they arrived at MSU. I still think about the early modern ecological imagination because of my work with the texts, and in another life, I would pursue that research.”

—MSU doctoral candidate April Best, former student in Singh's 2022 graduate seminar
College campuses across the country were rife with political activity both during and following the Civil Rights movement, with Michigan State University being counted among them. May of 1970 was an especially tumultuous time for college students across the United States. A series of protests occurred across the country after President Richard M. Nixon announced the expansion of the Vietnam War into Cambodia. On May 4 of that year, four students were killed at Kent State University. Campuses during this time in history were shut down by student strikes, both violent and nonviolent.

The MSU Libraries’ University Archives and Historical Collections (UAHC) has recently received materials that aid in preserving the events of this era that made headlines across campus and the greater MSU community. Last year, the UAHC received a collection of photographs taken by James J. Nugent Sr. (1942–2012) chronicling a Vietnam protest march and rally on May 14, 1970. Nugent was a custodian at the Bath Community Schools in Bath, Michigan, as well as a photography enthusiast who was able to capture the demonstration firsthand. The march started on campus and concluded with speeches at the Capitol building in downtown Lansing. It was sponsored by the Student Strike Mobilization Committee, Student Strike Steering Committee and other community groups to voice their view of the war and convince law makers to help end it. Throughout the war, students and faculty organized many protests and participated in nationwide days of protest.

The James J. Nugent collection contains poignant documentation of the protesters marching along Michigan Avenue in Lansing and rallying at the Capitol. Photographs include the front of the procession with a lead car, MSU students and people marching along the route along with protest signs, symbols and flags. There are also a few close-ups that reflect the emotions of the protestors and the significance of the march. Additional images in the collection include protestors demonstrating at a grocery store in support of the United Farm Workers, highlighting another important event that contributes to our understanding of activism at MSU and in the greater university community. This collection joins others at UAHC, including marches and protest photographs taken by the State News and campus staff members, as well as protest flyers collected by the Student Affairs Office.

Protests, marches and demonstrations at MSU and in the greater community are topics of consistent interest to researchers at the UAHC, largely because they are expressions of the student and community attitudes toward the events of the time. The MSU Archives and Historical Collections is honored to preserve the photographic legacy of James Nugent Sr., especially as the gift of the collection allows researchers to understand the historic events and MSU’s place in it.
A Year of Giving

MSU Libraries depend on generous contributions to help build and maintain scholarly resources and to help increase access to resources. We appreciate the investment in higher education our donors make when they give to our Libraries. Here’s a quick look at numbers for the 2022/2023 academic year.

If you’re interested in giving to the Libraries, please visit https://lib.msu.edu/support or contact:

Caitlyn Perry Dial, PhD
Director of Development
517-432-0032

8,212,088
Print volumes held

3,590,700
Ebooks held

63,910
Print books circulated

9,656
Reference transactions

544
Instruction sessions

544
Group presentations

7,306
Participants

Affordable Textbook Program

$8,405.82
Spent on books

51
Unique courses

17,099
Filled requests received from other libraries or providers

9,333
Filled requests provided to other libraries

Interlibrary loans

337
Makestation reservations

509
Project files completed

Open Educational Resources (OER)

$1,507,600
Estimated cost savings

15,076
Students enrolled in OER courses

126
Participating instructors

57
courses

428
sections

Selma D. and Stanley C. Hollander Makerspace

$1,069,903.81
Total $ amount raised 2022/2023 academic year

1,166
Total # of individual, corporate and foundation partners

$907,002.81
Cash support

$162,500
Estate commitments/revocable deferred gifts

Affordable Textbook Program

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Spent on books

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