



The Library as Laboratory

Introduction to Bridging Fields, Issue One

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The path that leads to the decision to study Library and Information Science often begins with an intersecting interest. In some cases, the field beckons as a clear entry point, but in many other cases the library presents a field that welcomes interdisciplinary practice, revealing itself as an option for further investigation to critical thinkers and practitioners from various disciplines (see this issue's "Interviews from the Field" for just a few of many examples).

The MLIS degree is a graduate degree, and so candidates are often coming with an existing knowledge or set of experiences. In some instances, for people already working in one field but needing the financial support of another, the library is a means to an end, just like any day job. But in other scenarios, the library has provided an answer for how to remain in a state of evolving dialogues, how to pursue multiple trades, or as an alternative way to create change and to engage with the infrastructure of information's organization. Library work may be characterized as care work, as ethnographic inquiry, or as authorship. Library work has been a way to enter the institution, to fight the institution, to build out of the institution—to critique, to reform, to abolish. There is something here, in this field, that seems to propose an opportunity for work that is rooted in the foundations of the ivory tower itself. And it is for that reason, perhaps, that so many of the most brilliant LIS thinkers, practitioners, and scholars have actually come to the field by way of an adjoining entry or window, rather than the front door.

My own experience was one of this nature—resembling peers featured in this inaugural issue and mentors who make up the Division of Libraries at NYU. I came to the library through the archive, and I

came to the archive from curation, event production, and publishing. My interests trace how memory and experience get tangled together in order to form different disciplines, methodologies, and approaches. When I first decided to study archives more seriously, I pictured it as a room within the library—as though the collections were *there* and the books were *here* and the students milled about in all the negative space in between. But, after a few weeks working in NYU’s library, I began to notice all of the offices, hidden behind unassuming doors; entries that led from a corner beyond the stacks into a maze of cubicles where there were more people—so many people—doing myriad activities. I began to notice the trail of individuals streaming into the library each day nearly blending into the students. The organism of the library is itself a layering of experiences. It captures information, but it pulls information apart, too. The library is as much about producing knowledges as it is about categorizing them.

Bridging Fields was affectionately referred to as the “Dual Degree Journal” throughout its working title phase. The idea for the journal originally came from Shawn(ta) Smith-Cruz, librarian and interdisciplinary scholar, as well as one of the coordinators for the dual degree program based out of NYU’s Bobst Library. The journal was discussed as a way to feature the work of first-year dual degree students, who were pursuing a subject Master’s (MA) as well as an MLIS through a unique partnership between New York University and Long Island University’s Palmer School of Information. The dual degree program’s cohort is a mixed bag each year—including students of varying ages, with various focuses, interests, and backgrounds, all working towards librarianship in addition to their subject specialties. The impetus for participation also varies, and the resulting positions and outcomes are similarly vast.

There’s a lot to be said about writing from the library, as librarians. The forms of writing are as diverse as the work itself may be, and range from technical to poetic, critical to explanatory. In some instances publishing is done for job security, such as tenure, and in other instances it is done as a method, as a form of engagement, as a creative outlet, or because it brings joy. The library is a laboratory, and librarianship is a creative act—from reference to research to cataloging. It is always an active, interwoven space.

In this inaugural issue of *Bridging Fields*, students share a variety of writing styles, resources, and interests pertaining to their subject degrees. These are research-driven projects, explorative not only in their research method but also in their presentation. These essays are as much driven by an individual interest as they are an attempt to engage with an audience, and translate exploratory processes into resources for broader use and insight.

Henry Cole Smith (English MA) spends time in the Fales Library within NYU’s Special Collections. His essay reveals the poetic musings of Samuel Greenberg scrawled onto a Bellevue Mental Hospital intake form. Smith pieces Greenberg’s poems together for readers, presenting not only the poetry but an exemplary approach to working with unpublished manuscripts. Georgia Kamm (History MA) and Mark Lindenburg (English MA) have similarly undertaken archival research, with articles that survey not just their findings but methodologies. As introductions to their work and resource guides in their own right, Kamm and Lindenburg effectively introduce the labors of research in New York City and abroad, demystifying the process for researchers both within and well beyond institutional affiliations.

Zachary Corolla (Food Studies MA) brings his background as a pastry chef to the library with a resource guide for working with cookbooks as research materials. Through personal insight, Corolla approaches these texts as ethnographic studies, drawing readers' attention to the versatility and breadth of material in the NYU Cookbook Collection.

Along with presenting student projects, the journal serves as a space for students to reflect on experiences within the program or positions within the NYU Library. After shadowing Bobst Library's Reference Department, Andrea Abraham (Costume Studies MA) explores the necessity of wayfinding signage in her reflective essay. My own position is similar; I write this introduction not only as the first student editor of the journal, but also as a dual degree intern who has been working on NYU's Manifold instance within Digital Scholarship Services—one of those departments that sits nestled within Bobst, and is made up of librarians who quietly oversee a maddening amount of the library's day to day going-ons.

In addition to articles from students in this year's mentorship cohort, we've published a series of interviews with authors published by Litwin Books, an independent academic publisher of books about media, communication and the cultural record. These interviews, conducted by dual degree students in last year's cohort (2022-2023), further underscore the multiplicity contained in the field of LIS publishing. The authors featured all have different focuses and have taken different paths to LIS. They each share a different outlook and engage thoughtfully in the future of the field through their scholarship and the ongoing dialogues they foster.

Bridging Fields is founded in a desire to provide a space for incantation and intrigue, grounded in the generative thoughts produced by those choosing to embrace interdisciplinarity and work across intersecting fields. It is our hope, with this first issue, that the ethos of the dual degree program comes through as such, and we look forward to building out the framework for these conversations in issues to come.