In Our Own Words
Cornell University Library
Who we are, what we do, and why it all matters.
fostering sustainable publishing
reaching out to the public
aspiring & inspiring
Preserving history
At Cornell University Library, we’re playing new, different, exciting roles — and defying old-school stereotypes.

With the flood of new technology and resources transforming the information landscape, the Library is more about the human touch than ever.

In this brochure, you’ll meet a highly diverse group of people who are specialists in...

- conducting deep research
- collecting and preserving history
- connecting people through technology
- bridging international and cultural divides
- reaching out to the community
- fostering sustainable publishing
- making a global impact

... and all of them are committed to addressing information needs in ways that were impossible to imagine 50 or 20 or even three years ago.

These library professionals will explain how their work enriches the University and stretches beyond Cornell’s immediate circle of influence to the world at large.

Although some things about the Library are radically different, some haven’t changed at all. Cornell University Library is still the heart of the University. And people — our diverse community of users and our dedicated staff — are still the heart of the Library.
I probably became a librarian for all the wrong reasons.

I hold a doctorate in piano performance and pedagogy from the University of Iowa, and when I was in graduate school, there was a big perk to working in the music library: You didn’t have to pay fines as long as you returned your materials eventually. I was a terrible patron and didn’t ever bring anything back on time, so working in the library was a great way for me to avoid paying!

I also had a wonderful mentor who asked me to make recommendations about which sound recordings our library should order. It was a different way of using my subject expertise, and it gave me the freedom to explore areas outside my usual field. I was hooked, and I went to library school for a master’s after I finished my music degrees.

I teach a four-credit course for doctoral students in their first semester. We work conceptually; rather than “here are the ins and outs of how to use this database,” we talk more about what databases are and how they work, so that they develop a basic understanding and it’s easy to approach any database. We talk about reading for approach, reading for bias… just bumping up the critical thinking a notch.

A hotel student recently asked for help creating a concept for a boutique hotel in a large metro area. He wanted to cater to amateur musicians and wondered what he could incorporate into the hotel — practice rooms, a concert series, sessions with local performers, a ticket service for shows and behind-the-scenes tours — that would be appealing. We talked about how to research the music scenes in various cities so he could get a flavor of different places. Because I’ve been at this long enough, both with music and with research, I could follow my instincts and help him get at the hard data.
I’m an archivist and the curator of the Regional History collection, which is really a collection of small, generous acts in the service of history.

Someone giving a gift of his or her personal life to our Library is connecting it to a greater story. For example, one afternoon, I drove out to an old farmhouse near Trumansburg. A woman had asked if we wanted her family papers, and I sat down at her kitchen table as she showed them to me. It turned out that it was an amazing set, going back to the 18th century. Her family members were all Quakers, and their correspondence and diaries were all about slavery, women’s rights, their views on religion and politics. It was amazing.

People are so humble, saying, “I don’t know if this is important.” Inside, I’m saying, “Oh my gosh, it’s incredible that these things got saved and found their way here to us, right here, right now.” These are exactly the kinds of sources we want to have. They allow people to see history first-hand.

We’re so glad to work with our Library’s state-of-the-art preservation and conservation lab, so that any documents that need attention or repair can get excellent work done on them. Our vault is designed to keep environmental variations to a minimum.

Being able to preserve these kinds of materials means that we’re not only helping first-year writing seminars or graduate-level research now, but that students 200 years from now will have access to the same materials. It’s kind of mind-blowing for students to imagine that far in the future.

Archival work doesn’t necessarily add new meaning to people’s lives, but it confirms the meaning of their lives in a broader societal context. To have parts of their lives preserved here — it’s profound. It’s a privilege for me to get to share that with people, and help them with it, and witness it.

Brenda Marston
Curator, Human Sexuality and Regional History Collections,
Department of Rare and Manuscript Collections
Connecting People Through Technology

I initiated VIVO, a Web application that creates a network of connections among researchers across disciplines and institutions.

When I came to Mann Library in 2001, I was given an extraordinarily open opportunity to explore what the Library should do in the life sciences. Our team had enough time to look with fresh eyes at what might actually be useful to faculty and students here, including current information on training and research. We thought outside the box, and the encouragement to be innovative made a huge difference.

We recognized that the faculty felt the need to know more about what was happening outside their immediate sphere in terms of communication with other researchers, student and faculty recruitment, and the development of new disciplines.

For example, we had one researcher tell us that his day-to-day contacts in his own department weren’t able to help him figure out how to find potential collaborators in computer science. VIVO was inspired by that need within the institution.

Most succinctly, it’s about recognizing that relationships are as important as the information itself.

VIVO was once limited only to Cornell, but it’s growing quickly. The scientific community has responded enthusiastically, with institutions far and wide adopting it in this country and abroad. The federal government also gave it a stamp of approval: We got a major grant from the National Institutes of Health to run a pilot project with six other institutions, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture has adopted it as well.

That speaks to the success of this project both in terms of the tool itself and of the new knowledge and relationships that develop as a result of it. We’ve found a way to represent connections that is clear and really simple to understand.

Jon Corson-Rikert
Director of Mann Library’s Information Technology Services
I’ve been involved in German Studies for my entire academic life, even as an undergraduate. I completed a PhD here at Cornell in the field. Today, much of my library work centers on supporting humanities scholarship, both in terms of providing resources for research through collection development and sharing the results of that scholarship.

**Book publishing is absolutely vital to scholars in the humanities**, but the state of academic publishing in the humanities today is really troubling. University presses, the main publisher of book-length academic materials in this country, need to be able to sell enough copies to sustain themselves.

Twenty-five years ago, libraries were the main source of revenue for university presses. But with library budgets under pressure, they’ve had to look for customers elsewhere, and now it’s just about 25 percent. It’s hard now for presses to break even on books in specialized fields, and when scholars can’t publish their manuscripts, entire fields are at risk.

At Cornell, the people who are most affected by this problem — the faculty, the University Press, and the Library — sat down together to figure out what to do about it in one humanities discipline. The result is *Signale: Modern German Letters, Cultures, and Thought*. It’s a peer-reviewed book series in literary and cultural studies of the German-speaking world, co-published by the Library and the Press. Cornell faculty members in German Studies are active on the editorial board.

We’re **working to create a new publishing model** with *Signale*. Scholars in the field are getting involved in the publishing process in new ways. We publish in both print and electronic formats, and some of the electronic content is free.

We hope that diversifying the formats and finding new marketing venues will generate a new audience that wouldn’t otherwise have found this material. It’s not just about German Studies, of course — we want the long-format monograph to survive, and in 20 years, it won’t exist as we know it if publishers and the academic community can’t arrive at a sustainable model. We hope *Signale* will be an example for others to follow.

**This project is simultaneously traditional and innovative:** it’s a new way of accessing information in a new kind of collaboration, but it’s also about preserving the space for specialized scholarly monographs that academia depends on.

**Kizer Walker**
Director of Collection Development and managing editor of *Signale: Modern German Letters, Cultures, and Thought*
Strategic initiatives involve things that aren’t “typical” librarian things — which works for me, because I don’t have a typical library background. I was born in China and lived in Germany before coming to America. I came to Cornell in 2002 and did my MBA at the Johnson School. Now I live in Taiwan, building international connections for the Library.

International collaborations are so important for libraries today. Our partnership with Tsinghua University in China, for example, is opening the doors to new collections, collaborative research, funding opportunities, greater efficiencies. It strengthens our own research environment here at home and helps us **build a global perspective.** Higher education is more and more collaborative and less and less location-based; we cannot just be local anymore, because our students and faculty could be in China or Qatar or Africa.

Our 2CUL collaboration with Columbia, where we share resources and integrate some operations, is another good example. We must create these **strategic alliances to meet more user needs** and access ever-expanding scholarly resources. No one can do that alone. Collaborations really are our future.

Cornell Library is the heart and center for knowledge and scholarship, for ideas, for learning. The business side of those things is critical to understand. Academia needs so many of those business skills: flexibility, good project management, the idea of taking smart measured risks. Libraries have always been user-oriented, but to deeply engage in studying what people want and need — that’s something that we adopt from successful businesses.

**Xin Li**
Assistant University Librarian for Strategic Initiatives
Not to sound corny, but the idea of doing outreach goes back to the history of America. I’m here because people fought for my right to work to get an education, so as a result of that I feel I owe something to the community. Outreach is a no-brainer for me — it’s part of who I am and what I believe in.

I work on the MLK Community Build, which is a big collaboration of nonprofits and educational institutions and other organizations in Tompkins County. It promotes the idea of reading and connects many sectors of Ithaca; together, we formulated a plan for the whole community to read Dr. King’s last book, Where Do We Go from Here. We wanted people to see him beyond the “I Have a Dream” speech, as a political thinker who addressed the problems of his day.

We secured money for 10,000 reprinted copies of the book so that we could give them away to anyone who wanted one. Now everyone is reading it: people in the Ithaca school district; the public library; all the colleges in the area. All for free. We’re leading book discussions and doing all kinds of events.

I was working with a 6th grade group and this kid told me his mother was reading the book now. He reached into his knapsack and pulled out a copy. He was so proud of himself, so excited. It made me proud too, because I’m using my knowledge to be a public resource.

The key thing when you go into a community is to listen, find a medium to work with people, and figure out how to meet their needs.

Eric Acree
Director, Africana Library
I'm the project director for TEEAL, The Essential Electronic Agricultural Library, which is run out of Mann Library. TEEAL provides journal subscriptions to income-eligible countries in places like sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

**TEEAL takes more than 200 journals and puts them in the palm of your hand**, on a tiny hard drive. It works offline, in places where an Internet connection isn’t reliable. Being able to download hundreds of articles without having to worry about whether the Internet is working today or not — that’s really the key.

We hear a lot of stories about the kind of scholarship that TEEAL makes possible, its impact on the literature, and how that changes lives. This is only one piece of the puzzle, but it is a critical piece for people in Nigeria and Kenya and Honduras and many other places.

I grew up in India, and my undergraduate degree and MBA were in business and finance from a university in Hyderabad.

Being Indian — coming from a developing nation 20 years ago — I was educated all the way through to my MBA without realizing what a modern academic library could provide. I had very limited access to resources.

For me, if anything should be the *number one mission of libraries*, it's equitable access. It's a hard goal to achieve, because equity sometimes comes at the cost of profit, and publishers are in this business to make a profit. But libraries should continue to strive for it, and TEEAL fits completely into that value system.

My first job at Cornell, as a student employee, was in access services — helping people check out books and find information. I’ve done reference and instruction and other valuable work, but the reason I came into libraries is because of that belief: *We must always strive to provide more access.*

**Baseema Krkoska**
International Projects Librarian
Aspiring & Inspiring

The Library is need-blind.

We invite everyone, from a senior scholar to the greenest incoming freshman, to participate in the intellectual life of the University. We provide the underpinnings to their education just as libraries everywhere represent the underpinnings for the basic right to read, to think, to give voice to opinions, new knowledge, and creative expression. I’m proud of the fundamental mission of libraries. Leading Cornell University Library means my work aligns perfectly with my own principles and values.

I spent the first third of my career as an archivist, which taught me to read in a new way. I have a profound respect for first-hand, documentary evidence that allows people to draw their own conclusions.

I prize research libraries’ ability to collect evidence that represents many points of view whether it aligns with popular beliefs or not. A great collection should be impervious to political and societal norms, and respect an individual’s right to access information with privacy and security.

Building our collections is our most pressing need. If all we had to do was purchase the “definitive” treatise on X, Y, and Z, we’d need a lot less. But a truly great library collects more — and for that, we need to go beyond the funding the University can provide.

Our Native American collection, for example, was a once-in-a-lifetime purchase. Our donors’ support was critical, allowing us to act quickly and flexibly in negotiations. Now, as we look to the University’s sesquicentennial, we’re especially focused on building an outstanding photographic record to complement our immense textual documentation on the political, social, and cultural milieu from whence Cornell sprung.

Another major priority is establishing named positions. Just two examples: We’d like to endow the directorship of Mann Library and support that person as an international leader. Our university archivist position should also be endowed, to secure our capability to collect 21st century materials that match those from the past century.

Furthermore, all of our engaged staff members — a few of whom you’ve met on the previous pages — continually need to update their skills, and we also want to attract the next generation of talented library professionals.

We have ambitious goals for our Library. Our strategic plan is broadly aspirational and inspirational, and there are grand challenges in it. We can’t wait to meet them.

Anne R. Kenney
Carl A. Kroch University Librarian
making a global impact

conducting deep research