

ARL Members Retiring or Stepping Down in Fall 2020

ARL's Kaylyn Groves interviewed the member representative retiring in fall 2020.

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Barbara I. Dewey

Dean of University Libraries and Scholarly Communications, The Pennsylvania State University

Barbara Dewey has led the University Libraries at Penn State since 2010 and plans to retire in December 2020. At Penn State, Barbara oversees the Pattee and Paterno Library, four branch libraries at the University Park campus and libraries at 22 Commonwealth Campuses, Media Technology Support Services, Penn State Press, and the University Records Management Program. Her legacy at Penn State includes the transformation of spaces in the Pattee and Paterno Libraries, the advancement of open access and open educational resources at Penn State, and the promotion of diversity initiatives, including the implementation of a diversity residency program at the University Libraries.



Prior to going to Penn State, Barbara served as dean of libraries at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, from 2000 to 2010. She also held several administrative positions at the University of Iowa Libraries, and prior to that held positions at Indiana University's School of Library and Information Science, Northwestern University Libraries, and Minnesota Valley Regional Library in Mankato, Minnesota. She is the author or editor of seven books and has published numerous articles and presented papers on research library topics, including leadership, digital libraries, technology, user education, publishing, fundraising, diversity, organizational change, and human resources.

Barbara has been active in the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) for two decades, serving on numerous committees and working groups as well as on the Board of Directors 2006–2010. Highlights of Barbara's ARL committee service include serving as: a member of the Diversity and Leadership Committee 2001–2003, chair of the Diversity and Leadership Committee and the Initiative to Recruit a Diverse Workforce Advisory Group 2004–2005, a member of the Diversity Initiatives Working Group 2006–2007, chair of the Transforming Research Libraries Steering Committee 2008–2010, a member of the Advancing Scholarly Communication Steering Committee 2011–2013, a member of the SPARC Steering Committee 2012–2015, a member of the Member Engagement and Outreach Committee 2016–2018, and a member of the Scholars and Scholarship Committee 2019–present.

ARL's Kaylyn Groves interviewed Barbara via video call on August 31, 2020. The interview follows.

Why and how did you get started in librarianship?

I was in college at the University of Minnesota, majoring in anthropology and sociology. I wanted to go to grad school but had an unfortunate experience that turned me off from pursuing a

graduate degree in those fields: a faculty member was talking to prospective grad students when someone asked her how she balanced family and work. She said, “Well, you get a nanny, of course.” That was so unappealing to me I started looking elsewhere. I saw library science in the graduate course catalog and thought I could hone my research skills that way and prepare for later graduate work in anthropology and sociology, which I never wound up doing. At 21, I was the youngest student in my library science program. I had never even worked for a library before—I had worked **in** a library doing research for faculty but had never worked **for** a library. My first library job right before I finished my MLS was in ILL as a staff member at Northwestern. Being in the staff ranks gave me a lot of insight that was useful later on.

What are the highlights of your career?

I may be one of the few ARL library directors who has also worked in a library school. Early in my career, when I was at Northwestern, my husband decided to complete his graduate education at Indiana University. He’s an African art historian and was taking an art bibliography class when he heard the library school was looking for a director of admissions and placement. I did that for seven years—admitting, advising, helping over 900 students find jobs, working with employers. It was very rewarding.

Then I decided to go to the University of Iowa to work with Sheila Creth, the new university librarian there. I was familiar with her from library HR discussion groups and knew she would do a wide variety of exciting things. As an AUL for her, I would have a broad range of opportunities, which interested me. I worked there 13 years, and my husband taught there. We both decided to look for more opportunities where I could obtain a leadership role and he could go somewhere where the field of African art history was highly valued.

We went to the University of Tennessee, which was totally different from anywhere we’d been before and a very good experience. I was fortunate to follow Paula Kaufman as dean of libraries at UT and inherited a very well-run library from her. The libraries didn’t have a large budget but we were able to do a lot. We stayed there 10 years before moving on to one more big adventure.

My husband was seeking a position where he had grad students again and I didn’t want to stay another 10 years at the same place. Opportunities at Penn State opened up, which was perfect.

I’ve been a dean of libraries for a long time—20 years—and I’ve been very active in ARL, and always excited about helping people come up in the field. One of the things I’m most proud of is my work in diversity, which I started doing quite a while ago when it wasn’t first on most people’s lists. I am probably most proud of supporting my husband and son in obtaining their PhD’s.

Other than mentoring and diversity, I’ve made significant contributions in the area of information commons development. At Iowa we created the Information Arcade in the early ’90s, one of the first such facilities in the country. We developed The Commons and The Studio at Tennessee. Penn State’s Knowledge Commons was well underway when I arrived thanks to the leadership of

Dean Nancy Eaton. The Knowledge Commons was completed along with the Collaboration Commons during my tenure.

I've always had projects, mostly writing and some speaking, that helped me be creative and serve as a role model. I feel strongly that research librarians should be involved in research in addition to service. I've also enjoyed working at institutions where librarians have faculty status because that means we play a bigger role in the shared governance of the university and have an easier entrée to working with faculty.

Were there goals that you set as a director that you have not yet reached?

There are always areas that need more attention. So much more needs to be done in diversity, especially today. And we're only partway down the road to open access in scholarly communication.

What advice do you have for individuals who aspire to leadership positions/roles in libraries?

Pay attention to including research, service, and excellence in your portfolio. At some institutions, if you don't have the research part, you won't be competitive. You've chosen research librarianship so you need to have some handle on research yourself or you'll be limited in your career.

What key issues do you think research libraries will face in the next five years?

Still facing us is diversity in a general way, not only recruitment and retention but also collections, digitization, and accessibility of physical spaces.

A big issue that finally hit us right in the face during the COVID-19 pandemic is the need for a much speedier transition to digital. We realized that when we went remote overnight. I would like to see a Big Ten or national plan for broad-based digitizing of collections. If there were a coordinated plan, we could cover more landscape, and achieve more diverse collections.

We also need to redouble our focus on students and be more student-centered. We've made progress there but we have more to do.

We need to do a more radical review of our spaces and how we use them. During the pandemic we've seen the benefit of inviting partners into our physical spaces, such as tutoring units, statistics consulting, different departments that don't report to the library but should be present in the library. We should take a proactive approach—go out and talk to faculty and research centers about what the libraries can do and what their needs are—don't wait for them to come to us.

We also need much more collaboration among libraries. Big Ten has the Big Collection. We need to get serious about treating that as our collection, in workflow, collection development, and digitization. We're not quite there yet.

What still inspires you about librarianship?

Supporting people in their careers is what I will miss. It has been great to see so many colleagues become ARL directors. The profile of ARL is totally different today than it was when I started at Tennessee in 2000, in a good way.

What do you look forward to in the next phase of your life?

My husband and I are retiring at the same time. We've been married 45 years and decided early to travel extensively, so we aren't as sad as some that we can't travel right now, but we are eager to do so when we can. Our family is in Minnesota and New York so we're planning to spend more time with them. I've always believed in making room for the next generation...it's time for me to move on to have new experiences.