Three ARL member representatives will be retiring or stepping down in fall 2021. Interviews or bios follow.

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Arnold Hirshon

Vice Provost and Lindseth Family University Librarian, Case Western Reserve University

After more than a decade as Case Western Reserve University's vice provost and university librarian, Arnold Hirshon will retire at the end of 2021. In recognition of his impact on the university and the Kelvin Smith Library—and to help ensure Arnold's leading-edge work continues with his successor—earlier this year Jon Lindseth and the Lindseth family endowed the position of vice provost and Lindseth Family University Librarian, which Arnold holds until his retirement.

During his tenure at Case Western Reserve, Arnold embraced new technologies, responded to the ever-evolving needs of library users, and made the library a more engaged learning environment. In 2019, the Association of College & Research Libraries recognized Kelvin Smith Library with its Excellence in Academic Libraries Award, noting exemplary services and resources. Under Arnold's leadership, the library has seen vast expansion of digital scholarship services; special collections, archives, and rare books; and the Personal Librarian program for first-year students (recently renamed the Library Advisor program).

Prior to joining Case Western Reserve in 2010, Arnold served as the executive director of NELINET and chief strategist and executive consultant at LYRASIS after its merger with NELINET, chief information officer and vice provost at Lehigh University, university librarian at Wright State University, associate director of libraries at Virginia Commonwealth University, and in library administrative posts at Duke University and Wayne State University.


Arnold is also a leading authority on the illustrations of the Alice works of Lewis Carroll and is currently collaborating with Jon Lindseth on Alice in a World of Wonderlands: The English Language Editions of the Four Alice Books Published Worldwide, forthcoming in 2021.

ARL’s Kaylyn Groves interviewed Arnold via email in October 2021. The interview follows.

**Why and how did you get started in librarianship?**

The answer to “how” is “circuitously,” and the “why” was incidental. I was an English major in college. Like so many English majors of my generation, as I approached graduation I was thinking about what should come next. In my senior year I did an independent study on the portrayal of, and plays written about, African Americans in the American theater, from Colonial times to the (then) present. I went to a college with a small library, so most of the source material, particularly for materials from the 18th through the early 20th centuries, had to be obtained through interlibrary
loan. At the time, there was a regional ILL center in upstate New York. Each time when the item I requested could or could not be found, I received a page-long explanation of where it was found, why it was impossible to obtain, or a correction to a citation. I found the research process fascinating. When I was deciding what I would make my career, librarianship came to the fore. Incidentally, I kept all of those ILL letters, and decades later I was able to find the librarian who responded to all of my requests. I thanked him for his work then and the career path he put me upon. He replied that he enjoyed my requests because he was a fairly new librarian at that time, and he found my requests so unusual and fun to research.

**What are the highlights of your career?**

So many things. In my career I worked in six academic libraries: three ARL members (plus one of which has recently become an ARL library), three public universities, three private. I also was the chief executive of a large regional library consortium for 10 years. I count as highlights not only the things I enjoyed at the time, but also the mistakes made, the problems I had to face, and even the sometimes painful lessons I learned along the way.

In terms of a sense of sheer personal reward, perhaps at the top of the list is the work I did for the last 21 years with EIFL, a consortium of library consortia that had as many as 50 developing countries as members. I just retired as the chair of the Management Board, but earlier I worked for them as an educator and consultant for many years. It was profoundly moving and rewarding to have had the opportunity to work with so many dedicated professionals, often being able to work with them in their countries in Africa, Central and Eastern Europe, and Asia. I made great friends through the process, and I was always inspired by the resourcefulness of the members. One of the great lessons I learned while working with EIFL is that it is easy to do big things when you have a big budget, but true creativity and innovation in libraries occur when you are able to achieve life-changing things on a small budget. You learn to value what you have rather than bemoan what you wish you might have instead.

Other career highlights include having been an agent of change in every library in which I worked. Sometimes that role is not always appreciated in its time, but it is a hardwired part of my personality. I couldn’t stop myself even if I wanted to. Early in my career I was labelled as a “young techno-Turk,” a moniker I chose to accept as a badge of honor. I was probably called some other things that were less pleasant, but I was content as long as my work was helping to advance the mission of the library.

Being able to complete my career as vice provost and Lindseth Family University Librarian at Case Western Reserve University has truly been a great career highlight. I have had the pleasure of working with staff members who were very committed to their work, very collaborative, and open to new ideas. Even with limited resources I think we were able to work together to achieve some remarkable things. We experimented, assessed, and refined along the way. In addition, the support of some donors whom I now call friends was an added bonus to being able to work at a university that is very special.

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

How much time do we have? There will always be more things that I wish I might have been able to accomplish, but the work of building libraries is always a work in progress. Any director is a temporary steward. In the moment, we feel like the Red Queen in *Through the Looking-Glass—*
always running as fast as we can but still staying in the same place. However, when we look in retrospect we see the progress that was made. We don't necessarily always get to do everything or be around to partake of the long-term benefits. As I have often said, “even Moses didn't get to enter into the Promised Land.” Perhaps that is because the Promised Land is forever on the horizon but never fully within reach? The question for me is not the goals I didn't reach, but whether overall I am leaving the library for my successor in a better place than I found it? I hope so.

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

My response is simple: if you are assigned or you assume a task you have never done before, even if you don't have a clue what to do, you dive in, figure it out, and dazzle me with your results. Don't worry if you fail. One can dazzle even with a glorious failure. Every project is not successful, but it can be successful if you learn from the failure. As the leader, you should create a climate in which your staff feel it is safe to fail.

A leader always needs to be agile and adaptive, and to inspire others in the organization to be so. Unexpected situations will land on your desk, and you have no choice but to get creative and spend the time to do the best you can. These situations also require that leaders possess an important characteristic: a high tolerance for ambiguity. This was most strikingly tested when COVID hit, but there are some less dramatic unanticipated situations that pop up every year. You can't always remove the ambiguity from every situation, but you can develop positive coping skills to adjust to the situation. How well you adjust will be noticeable to your staff. They are looking not for you to make everything right immediately, but for you to demonstrate the confidence that will help them navigate through it. The more ambiguous the situation is, the more important it will be for you to be as open and transparent about the situation. Transparency does not require breaking confidentiality nor does it mean unloading a “data dump” of everything you know. It means sharing in a timely way what you know and what you plan to do about it so that staff can understand what is happening, how it will affect their jobs, what they should do individually, and what the next steps will be for the library as a whole. In the moment it is not always possible to know or share everything, and there will be inevitable failures of communication, but most staff will accept that as long as they believe a sincere effort is being made.

To lead also means that you need to be well informed. Read, read, read, attend, attend, listen, listen, listen. Do a good deal of your information gathering from outside of the library profession. Read business, technology, history, and other literature—both fiction and nonfiction. Learn about areas of library operations with which you are unfamiliar (or are less familiar), which may include facilities, fundraising, budgeting, planning, or marketing. Make sure you understand the broader university environment and where the library currently fits and where the new opportunities may lie. Absorb new concepts and think about how to apply this knowledge to create a new and relevant opportunity for your staff and for the library.

Finally, don't worry about messing things up. Accept that it is part of your job because change is necessary, but inherently messy. Embrace the times you will need to be a risk-taker, or even be an iconoclast who takes a bold stand. Nothing great happens without courage, but also know which battles are worth fighting and the best time to undertake them. And most of all, experiment. Don’t try to make all changes all at once; in fact, it is a mistake to try to make everything perfect from the get-go. Let everyone know in advance that what you are undertaking (whether it is a facility, policy, or service change) is an experiment, and that if it doesn’t work we will work together to fix it or adjust it. Staff, faculty, and students will appreciate your honesty. Once you make a change,
live with it for a while to assess its success or the need to adjust or whether to declare and accept failure. Once you begin to make adjustments, people will realize you were sincere in your willingness to reconsider things. That will help sustain the level of trust you will need to undertake the next challenge.

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

To prove our continuing value in a world that will be adjusting to post-pandemic (or “next-pandemic”) times. The survivability of the residential research university is still an open question; my belief is that it will still be there, but undoubtedly will be quite different. For example, many staff will be working hybrid work schedules, which will pose many challenges for leadership to adjust to new ways of communication, but this can also open up doors for better ways to do things and help staff achieve a healthy work/life balance.

Within five years, the students who today are in middle school will be incoming first-year students. Their expectations and needs will be significantly different than those of today’s college students, not only socially and technologically, but also in their psychological makeup because of two formative years when they experienced mandatory isolation followed by more years of being in a physically masked environment. How will the library change itself to adapt to these new students in terms of services or physical facilities, and what new campus partnerships may become more important to achieve your new vision?

**What still inspires you about librarianship?**

Our adaptability as organizations. As creatures of academe there are always recalcitrants in our midst, but over the decades the library has often been a campus leader in change. We have been highly successful not only at making such changes within our own walls, but also at being campus beacons when we provided reimagined or entirely new services and systems. We don’t always get the credit we deserve for doing so, but sometimes the reward comes from within ourselves.

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

Traveling and relaxing with family and friends is the first item on the agenda. There will also be more time to pursue my research and bibliophilic interests (both of which involve the work of Lewis Carroll), as well as my interests in photography, exercise (especially biking, hiking, and swimming), and cooking. I will also volunteer for organizations whose missions are ones about which I am passionate. And I will occasionally take a nap!

**Is there anything else you would like to say?**

I know from experience that every successor will wonder from time to time: what was he thinking when he took a specific action? Didn’t he foresee how, when, or why this would become a problem? This brings to mind the last line of *Tea and Sympathy*, which I would paraphrase this way: in the future, when you think of my time here—and you will—please be kind. I know I was far from perfect, but I hope I got at least a few important things right. And my successor now has the opportunity to build on whatever successes I may have had and to take the library to even greater heights.
Brenda Johnson

Library Director and University Librarian, The University of Chicago

Brenda Johnson is retiring on November 14, 2021, after serving as university librarian at The University of Chicago since 2015.

Brenda has led The University of Chicago Library in excelling in a changing environment, enhancing access to physical and digital collections and resources, advancing digital scholarship, extending the university’s impact through local and global engagement, and cultivating an inclusive community. She has spearheaded efforts to empower faculty and students in their research, teaching, and learning by expanding research and development opportunities. She has overseen the launch of the library’s Center for Digital Scholarship, which enables faculty and students to explore new methodologies, analyze complex data, visualize theoretical and spatial relationships, and share and preserve research results. Under her leadership, the library has led the development and expansion of Knowledge@UChicago, the digital repository for preservation and sharing of the scholarly, creative, and administrative assets of the university. Brenda has introduced the provision of geographic information system (GIS) services through the hiring of a new GIS/maps librarian and the opening of a GIS Hub in the Crerar Library.

As a result of Brenda’s successful oversight of development work during the recent campaign, The University of Chicago Library has launched the Hanna Holborn Gray Graduate Student Fellowship Program. This program enables students to explore alternative scholarly careers in libraries and archives, to enhance their research skills, to plan and deliver instruction, and to conduct digital scholarship. Brenda has also expanded staff expertise in new and rapidly developing areas of librarianship through the launch of the Library Residency Program. Under her leadership, the library has prioritized cultivating an inclusive community as one of its six strategic directions and has established a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Team to provide additional leadership and support to advance these directions. Brenda and the library have also taken a leading role in organizations and consortia that have benefited researchers locally, regionally, nationally, and worldwide. The library is the home of the Black Metropolis Research Consortium, and participates in HathiTrust and in the Ivy Plus Libraries Confederation’s Web Collecting Program.

Prior to her arrival at The University of Chicago, Brenda served as the Ruth Lilly Dean of University Libraries at Indiana University (IU) Bloomington in 2010–2014, during which time IU was recognized as the top Academic Library of the Year in 2010 by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). During Brenda’s tenure, the IU Libraries launched new spaces and developed innovative models for delivering library services; the IU Scholars’ Commons exemplified both, as it offered a centralized academic service hub and built on partnerships with departments across campus. Brenda also provided crucial leadership for the university’s digital preservation initiatives, including the Media Digitization and Preservation Initiative and the Digitization Master Plan.

Before joining Indiana University, Brenda was the university librarian at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) for two years. Major initiatives coordinated by Brenda at UCSB
included planning for a $62 million library addition and renovation, the UCSB Reads program (engaging the campus and community in conversations about a key topic while reading the same book), an increased emphasis on outreach to students and faculty, and a rejuvenation of fundraising efforts for the UCSB libraries.

Brenda served the University of Michigan in various roles for more than 20 years, distinguishing herself as associate university librarian for public services with responsibility for the university's 19 libraries. She pioneered innovative programmatic services, such as integrating librarians more directly into the research process (Field Librarian Program and credit course, Research Methods in the Digital Library); launched virtual reference services; created librarian development programs (Instructor College, recipient of 2003 ACRL Innovation in Instruction Award); provided venues for students to showcase their work (Café Shapiro); integrated library resources into the CTools learning management system through the creation of a curriculum integration librarian position; and collaborated with the School of Public Health in creation of a new informatics division. She spearheaded planning for transforming and enriching learning spaces for research, teaching, and learning.

Brenda currently serves as the chair of the Big Ten Academic Alliance (BTAA) Library Director group and is a recent member of the Chicago Collections Consortium Board of Directors, the Library and Archives Advisory Board to The HistoryMakers, and the Freedom of Information Archive Advisory Board. In her role as past chair of the Open Library Environment (OLE) Board of Directors, she has led staff members at The University of Chicago Library and colleagues at partner institutions in the development of an open-source, community-based library management system that is being used at research libraries in the United States and Europe.

Mary Ann Mavrinac

Vice Provost and Andrew H. and Janet Dayton Neilly Dean of the University of Rochester Libraries

Mary Ann Mavrinac has served as the vice provost and Andrew H. and Janet Dayton Neilly Dean of the University of Rochester Libraries since June 2012. From 2001 to 2012, Mary Ann was chief librarian at the University of Toronto Mississauga, where she, with many people and many teams, led from vision to occupancy an award-winning academic library—the Hazel McCallion Academic Learning Centre. From 1999 to 2001, Mary Ann was head of The D.B. Weldon Library at the University of Western Ontario (now Western University).

Mary Ann’s interests and research focus on library as place, leadership, and mentoring—topics about which she is frequently invited to speak and write. She led the development of a 10-year strategic facilities master plan for the Rush Rhees Library, aimed at stewarding the iconic space for years to come, including the launch of Evans Lam Square and the Barbara J. Burger iZone. In 2010, Mary Ann was the president of the Ontario Library Association. In 2014, the Ontario College and University Library Association honored her with its Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2021, she was honored with the Robert F. Metzdorf Award for meritorious service to the libraries by the Friends of the University of Rochester Libraries and an emeritus appointment with the University of Rochester upon her retirement.


Mary Ann holds a BA and BEd from the University of Toronto, an MLS from Western University, and an EdD in educational leadership for change from Fielding Graduate University.

ARL’s Kaylyn Groves interviewed Mary Ann via email in August 2021. The interview follows.

Why and how did you get started in librarianship?

I serendipitously entered the profession when I was pursuing my bachelor of education degree at the University Toronto. One of the electives I wanted to take required a bronze level in swimming,
necessitating that I achieve that during my studies. I checked out the pool. It was dark and dank. I looked down the list of electives, and selected “school librarianship.”

**What are the highlights of your career?**

Anything I have done has been in relation to the outstanding teams, individuals, administrators, donors, friends, and mentors with whom I have had the privilege to work.

That said, starting my career at the University of Western Ontario (now called Western University) was a formative experience as I learned so much and forged lifelong friendships.

Leading a new library building project at the University of Toronto Mississauga was an epic experience, the absolute highlight of my career.

Having the opportunity to be president of the Ontario Library Association in 2010 and, in turn, serving on the Board of ARL and assuming the presidency in 2018, were really interesting, challenging, and rewarding experiences, and quite frankly, an honor and a privilege.

And finally, moving to the States and assuming my role at the University of Rochester (UR) was a pivotal life decision. Rochester warmly welcomed me and the River Campus Libraries team have been inspiring. The highlights at the UR are too numerous to mention, a credit to our outstanding team. When I moved to Rochester, I had the good fortune that several senior leaders reached out and guided me along the way: Larry Alford, Connie Vinita Dowell, Tom Hickerson, Anne Kenney, Joan Lippincott, Susan Nutter, and Karin Wittenborg. What powerhouses they are/were! I learned so much from them and am enormously indebted to their generous spirits.

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

This is a tough question because, if we’re doing our jobs, there should always be things that we haven’t yet reached. So, I’ll duck that question, and share some advice that I once received: remember to look back because always looking forward can sometimes be depressing as there’s still so much to do. If you look back, you can see the progress that has been made. It bolsters your confidence and provides the energy and fortitude to keep going irrespective the challenge.

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

My advice is to pay attention to, care about, and hear what the people who comprise our organizations are saying or not saying. We cannot lead without the hearts and minds of all organizational members. Shared leadership has become a catchphrase. Properly done and constructed, it is—to me—the only way to go.

Second, build that network beyond your library: with other university leaders, library leaders, influencers outside of the library sector, donors, and friends. In these jobs, we need all of the advice and support we can get. Keep those relationships strong and hear from dissenters, as well.

Keep learning, including working with a professional coach, attending formal learning sessions, and/or committing to degree or certificate programs to augment your credentials. We are a learning profession. Embrace learning.
Lastly, I am a big fan of using consultants. That external lens and the facilitation they provide can move mountains when done well.

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

Something that we've known for a very long time that continues to be critical is digital asset management to ensure our collections and resources are available for future generations of scholars and researchers.

Library as place. The pandemic is demonstrating that the library’s virtual space is as important as its physical spaces. Leveraging both are essential, especially the critical role we play in experiential learning and research.

Transformative publisher agreements towards greater openness of scholarly content continues to be a work in progress with two steps forward and one step back, yet we must persist.

We are still challenged in communicating the unique value proposition of research libraries. We are the interdisciplinary nexus at our institutions. Continuing to work with the ARL team on sculpting messaging that we can send to senior administration on key issues that research libraries can lead, and/or be of assistance on, is essential.

Working at scale across libraries is crucial. Unlike Canada, where all research libraries can work together on many issues given the country’s relative smaller size, it is harder to do this nationally in the US. This bifurcation can dilute impact.

And, last but not least, we must continue our commitment to attract and retain people from underrepresented races to the research library profession

**What still inspires you about librarianship?**

The robustness of this profession in relation to the boundlessness of library work, from innovation hubs to rare materials to immersive technologies, etc., etc., is infinitely inspiring.

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

I look forward to unstructured time while at the same time planning on staying engaged with the UR and the profession. The UR honored me with emeritus status so my current email will continue. Time will allow me to return to my roots in northern Ontario (Kirkland Lake), live on Kenogami Lake (look it up!) where we are building a home, and allow me to hike, fish, snowshoe, ski, kayak, play the piano, read, get involved in the community, travel, cook, and the list goes on. I am super excited about this next phase.

**Is there anything else you would like to say?**

It was a singular privilege to serve on the ARL Board for six years. Getting to know the work of the ARL staff was eye-opening and inspiring, given the impact of this relatively small group of professionals under the leadership of Mary Lee Kennedy. Their dedication, expertise, and passion are a force multiplier for all of us. To all my ARL colleagues: thank you for your camaraderie, good will, and friendship. It has been an amazing experience to get to know you over the years, especially my RLLF buddies.