

## Ginny Steel

Norman and Armena Powell University Librarian, UCLA



Since 2013, Ginny Steel has served as the UCLA Norman and Armena Powell University Librarian. Earlier this fall, Ginny announced her intention to step down from the post that she has enjoyed. As she reflects on her career in librarianship, she shared some of her career highlights, her advice to aspiring leaders, the areas of librarianship that continue to inspire her, some of the challenges that future leaders may

have to address, and a preview of what her next chapter may entail.

While Ginny's career has directly influenced the libraries at Arizona State University (ASU), UC San Diego, MIT, Washington State University (WSU), UC Santa Cruz, and finally UCLA, she has and will continue to play an active role in shaping governance for the national and international library community through service to ARL, the Center for Research Libraries (CRL), HathiTrust, OCLC, and other organizations.

Although Ginny's positions have included coping with a number of emergencies and less-than-desirable events, including fire, a flood, and a rat infestation, one happy highlight she fondly recalls is the acquisition of the Grateful Dead archive while she was university librarian at UC Santa Cruz. That collection generated a huge amount of interest and excitement for the library.

One bit of advice Ginny has for others is to encourage all library workers to embrace leadership, whether volunteering to serve as a committee chair or perhaps working on a major report. There will always be space to explore and try new ideas that add value to your institution. Ginny believes that those opportunities are great vehicles to learn and also contribute a fresh perspective to the issues being addressed.

Since Ginny began her career, librarianship has changed immensely from offering the traditional onsite menu of services and resources to a combination of an in-person and virtual presence. Libraries have introduced new ways of making their services and collections more accessible to faculty, students, and other library end-users who need to find the information and resources when needed, wherever they are.

When asked about her suggestions on ways to solve some of those challenges previously discussed, Ginny confidently said that library leaders should use an iterative framework to “gather data about current use patterns, analyze it, consider solutions that are creative, scalable, and sustainable, and try to build in a feedback loop with library users to keep improving services.” Simply said, find out what is beneficial to users.

Artificial intelligence (AI) continues to be a catch phrase on many people’s minds. In several respects, there is uncertainty with how AI will impact the work of libraries. As libraries continue to explore the journey into the ever-expansive realm of digital service offerings, AI offers the potential for leaders to re-envision many facets of library work. Ginny, for example, suggests that “using AI to handle some of the repetitive work that individuals are doing means we can reallocate staff to work on other service offerings.”

No one can predict the future. But, in 10 to 15 years, Ginny believes that libraries will still provide an important physical presence in universities, and they will continue to expand use of spaces, enhancing opportunities for students to collaborate with one another on group projects, access technology and innovation labs, complete individual research, and relax with friends and colleagues over a meal or beverage.

Looking forward, the library community has a greater role to play in the preservation of cultural heritage. Global warming, natural disasters, political instability, and wars place the archives of social history in peril. “We must take a more comprehensive approach to this issue by finding models for community archiving and preservation that ensure that those materials remain where they originated,” Ginny said.

Ginny, like many professionals during their career, created an aspirational wish-list of things to accomplish in her positions at UCLA and elsewhere. Some of these goals were accomplished while others remain priorities for the future and her successors.

Ginny’s parting words to library leaders are, “It is important to remember that solutions are often incremental, so be persistent when thinking of creative ways to address challenges, and continue to maintain an optimistic mindset. The problems library leaders face do not have easy solutions—if they did, they wouldn’t still be problems. But, by taking innovative approaches and being resourceful, over time, major progress will be made.”

While Ginny’s tenure at UCLA might be coming to an end, her career isn’t; she plans to remain active in the library community. In fact, Ginny is the incoming OCLC Board chair. Her presence in the profession will continue for some time. In her free time, however, Ginny will remain in Southern California, as she continues to enjoy the beautiful surroundings of the area, pursue her hobbies of weaving and quilting, and spend time with family and friends.

From ARL, we wish Ginny the best, and thank her for her continued contributions to librarianship!

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