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“Librarians Navigating Change” Oral History Project

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David Eifler

Interviewed on April 7, 2025
By Ann Glusker

--For more information about this project, and the oral history method in general, please consult the Project Overview Document at the URL provided above.

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00:00:02 **Ann**

This is Ann Glusker interviewing David Eifler on April 7, 2025, for the "Librarians Navigating Change" Oral History Project. This is a remote interview. Ann is in Seattle, Washington, and David is in Berkeley, California.

Thank you so much for being here with me today. I guess we'll dive in. To start, can you tell me about your background and how you came to librarianship?

00:00:36 **David**

Actually, I was trained with a master's degree in City and Regional Planning at UC Berkeley. And when I graduated, after living in Spain for a year, I came back and ran homeless shelters in Oakland for a decade and then got tired of being poor and went to work for Bayer Corporation. I ended up being their senior manager for planning and operations for their biotech division.

After I had a child, I decided that I was done with the corporate world after a decade there, and took a year off to raise my child. In the meantime, my wife got a teaching position at Brown University. And after getting us all moved out there, I decided I wanted to become a librarian. I thought at the time I wanted to be a public librarian, as part of the remaining bit of the commons in society, which was under attack. So, I went to school at the University of Rhode Island and got my librarian degree in 2005. And then, as we do in librarianship, I worked a series of librarian jobs around the state of Rhode Island, and was about to get a job.

I was the next one up and had made my bones. [But] my wife got recruited back to Berkeley. So, I followed her back here and we took a cross country trip. Just before we were about to leave, someone informed me that there was a job at Berkeley, and it was in the Environmental Design Library, which is where I had gotten my master's degree. So, I applied, got an interview. Long story short, I started work at the University of California at Berkeley in the Environmental Design Library in October of 2007. I had a series of different jobs. I started out as a reference instruction librarian, then we lost a librarian in that library. We had three at the time. And I became the urban planning and instruction librarian. Then we lost the head librarian. So now we're down to one librarian from three. I became the librarian and interim head for three years. And then in December of 2014 we reorganized and I became the Environmental Design Librarian.

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I was there until I retired this past September in 2024. So that final position was for 10 years, but 17 years, all told, at the University of California.

00:03:14 **Ann**
Thank you. Actually, do you mind if I back up just for a second? You said, “Well, I thought maybe I'd like to become a librarian. So, I went to library school.” But where did that idea come from?

00:03:29 **David**
Well, interesting story. I was taking my young 2- and 3-year-old son to the library all the time, and I kept saying, “Oh, isn't this great? The library's so great.” And he turned to me one day, and he knew that I was thinking about the next career, and said, “Papi, why don't you become a liberrian?”

It took me a while to settle with the notion, because I had all these gendered stereotypes, especially for public librarians. But, then as I talked to more and more people, more and more of my wife Rachel's colleagues at Brown, they said, “Yeah, you'd be awesome at that.” And then I thought, “Oh, well, maybe I should do that.” So that was kind of the genesis. My three-year-old convinced me to become a librarian.

00:04:07 **Ann**
[Laughs] Fantastic. Wow, thanks for that. I think that you've covered the questions that I had about that. So, just to kind of look at the arc… From the position titles you mentioned, I have a sense of what the arc may have been, but can you characterize a little bit for me [what] things were like on a typical day, or what was the situation when you started at Berkeley and then when you left?

00:04:38 **David**
It's kind of interesting in the sense that I came in at what I would call the inception of the re-generalization of librarians. I think I was hired because I had this master's degree in city and regional planning. I knew the field, and maybe even more importantly, I knew the people in the department. I knew the players. That was attractive. But I was hired in as a reference and instruction librarian. I think that was largely due to the fact that the other people working in the library were kind of tired of reference and instruction and they wanted to kind of offload some of it.

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I love reference and instruction. I think others would agree I'm pretty good at it. And I enjoy it. I enjoy working with students and I enjoy working with faculty. I was never really the bibliographer type of librarian. Like, I knew the material, I swam in those waters. I understood it. But reading book reviews never really did it for me. Talking to students, finding out what their research interests were, finding out where they were coming from and what motivated them to do what they were doing, as well as faculty and community scholars, that was where I got my real juice from.

And then I became more and more of a subject specialist, in the way one does when one inherits a subject. So, it wasn't that I had a PhD in architecture. Far from it. I didn't know anything about architecture, but I sat in on classes and learned that field a little bit better so that I could become a bibliographer in that. But what we have is our subject experts are leaving the field. We had a planning and landscape librarian. She retired. I became the planning [liaison], the head librarian for that library, because at that point all of the libraries were headed by a librarian… the head was an architecture scholar. When she retired, I inherited architecture and landscape.

I had to take that on. So, in that, you lost a lot of expert knowledge. And I became more of a generalist, a generalist who at least was tied to environmental design: the College of Environmental Design, the Environmental Design Library. So, I was able to specialize in that broader field. I see that as kind of being the arc of librarianship over the last, I would say 15 years, pretty much since I entered the field, 15, 20 years [ago], is a move away from subject specialty, subject specialization to more generalist, or what I'll call, it's probably a misnomer, but skills-based librarianship, away from subject-based librarianship.

00:07:36 **Ann**

One thing I'm seeing in the literature a lot is the word functional, the move from the subject-liaison model to functional specialty, whatever model. It's a shift that has been noted by more than just you, it's actually the one that I'm the most interested in. But as I've been researching for these interviews, there's been so much change over the past 20 to 30 years, [really] throughout all time in librarianship. But, when you cast your mind back over, let's say the last 17 years, what did you see as some of the big change points or inflection points during that time?

00:08:25 **David**

They tend to be punctuated by economic crises. Because I actually, I think a lot of people say, oh, COVID changed everything, or ChatGPT changed everything. I don't think so. I think it's

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more of an arc. And that arc follows the larger societal changes of neoliberalization, quite frankly, the privatization of resources.

So, the thing I got into librarianship for was because it was one of the remaining areas of the commons, you could see that it was only a matter of time before that would slowly diminish. Whether you call it privatization or neoliberalization or techno-feudalism or whatever you want to call it, the ability for librarians to have dominion over their day-to-day work and dominion over their subjects or their students was whittled away.

I start in 2007. We have the 2008 crisis, [the] financial crisis at the University of California. That was a financial crisis that in fact was precipitated 20 years before by a decision, or maybe lack of decision, at the state level to slowly de-fund higher education. I don't think there was ever a moment when they said, okay, we're going to de-fund education. It was just an easy place to grab money for the many competing desires that there were. So, for example, when I was in graduate school, 1984, 1985, the state was picking up 50% of the University of California's budget. It now picks up about 10%. So, there's going to be responses to that. And, there were responses on the part of librarians.

Our union became more active. We leaned on the union more, moved from being a service union to much more of an activist union. We advocated for better money for librarians, because we could no longer afford to live in the Bay Area. That wasn't the University of California's fault that we couldn't live in the Bay Area. But those larger trends forced us to be more organized, and organized on our behalf. And in response, we start to see administration, which has become very much bloated at this point—this is not unique to the University of California or libraries—we see administration respond back by pushing back against librarians.

It got so bad that, I don't know, five, six years ago, when we had negotiated a new library contract, our University Librarian was saying things like, “The librarian salary [increase] is an unfunded mandate.” Now who talks like that? Either economists, which our University Librarian was, or Republicans, and I don't think he was that. But, this notion that the librarians, the face of the library and the professionals, the ones who've been trained, the ones who have a professional ethos and ethics are the, are now an “unfunded mandate”, was a very much of a shift.

And then we, then we march into COVID. Right? So COVID is a huge thing, society-wide. We all learn how to work from home. For many of us, that was a great thing--to have time at home

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and whatnot. But it also became kind of a wedge where people didn't come back to work, where students who desperately needed us… when the COVID crisis was over in 2022, we had three generations of students who didn't know how to use libraries.

We weren't coming back to work that quickly. And when we were, we were kind of hiding out in our offices. In response to that, management said, "Oh, well, librarians don't want to work at reference desks, so we're not going to make them work at reference desks." So just at this moment when we're on the verge of needing to train a whole new generation because student generations are four years long, a whole new generation of students on how to use the library, we're told, "Oh, no, it's okay. Stay in your office. Work from home." So that connection between our natural clientele and ourselves is severed to a large degree. And we were, in most cases, willing participants in that. But I think it was a huge mistake. I think it was a huge mistake.

And then the narrative developed that staff people, most of whom did not have librarian degrees, were upset with librarians, because we weren't coming to work and they had to be there. We deferred a lot of the responsibility for student work off onto staff who had never been responsible for that primarily, and then said, "Oh, well, you know, we're concerned about our health. We need the time to work from home," and started to articulate this, "Well, I can do most of my work from home." So, when we became complicit in that alienation of the work that we did from our patron base, I think we hurt ourselves to a degree. And I think management was all more than happy to facilitate that. Sorry, you got more than you asked for. Huh?

00:13:57 **Ann**

Oh, I'll take anything. That's really interesting and some [of it] I want to talk about some other time with you too, but, do you mind just going on a little bit of a tangent? Because one thing I'm loving about what you're saying is that there's a lot of big picture there… but if you come [into the] small picture, what parts of maybe Berkeley culture or Berkeley's unique position contributed to some of the things that you're mentioning?

00:14:29 **David**

Well, so you know Berkeley has a unique place in public higher education. It's often been heralded as the number one public university. Within the University of California 10-campus system, it was the first, [and] it was the one that inherited the moniker "Cal." When you say Cal, you're talking about Berkeley. You're not talking about any of the other 10 campuses. And I think Berkeley culture always had a sense of exceptionalism. We set the rules that other people

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played by. [But] I would say in the 80s, 90s, certainly by the 2000s, that had started to change. We see other campuses emerging as flagships.

So, if you think of other state systems like the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor is the flagship. They have other campuses, but if you think of the University of Michigan, you think Ann Arbor. And it used to be that way with the University of California as well. Berkeley was the flagship. And then UCLA starts on the ascendancy, UC San Diego. So, I think most people would say at this point, we have three flagship campuses, those being the other two. We have a medical university that does nothing but medical. Some of us, and I'm guilty of this as well, will say that UCSF is Berkeley's medical school. People over at UCSF wouldn't agree with that in the least. Nor would virtually anybody, other than the arrogant people like me who say that.

Berkeley's uniqueness was a hindrance in many ways. We felt that we could bend the university's will to ours and it made us somewhat reluctant to adopt change when we needed to. So, dumb things like when we moved from GLADIS [General Library Automated Database Information System], which was our homegrown library information system, to… Oh, and you're gonna have to help me now. I can't even remember the names. Was, uh, it Alma? I guess?

00:16:29 **Ann**
No, Millennium.

00:16:30 **David**
Excuse me. You know, and I was on the committee that helped usher that in. The way we implemented Millennium was to make it look like GLADIS. Fortunately we only did it to ourselves. Then we moved on to Ex Libris, the next generation of ILS [Integrated Library Systems]. That was a system-wide thing, I think that was. We tried to make it work like our legacy systems and nobody else was happy. There was enough power in the other institutions to push back on that. And I think by and large that was a good thing. I think we undermined ourselves in areas where we did have expertise, and could have had a larger voice in that implementation.

I think we're disregarded because we were so wed to doing some really dumb older things as well. Berkeley was kind of just written off. I think that sense of exceptionalism that Berkeley has always had, met us in the 21st century and was actually reviled by the rest of the system.

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You had a system that was taking much more power. It was in the 1960s, just to go back a ways, that the Chancellor of the University of California, Berkeley, ceased being the president of the University of California. They were one and the same up until the 60s. The other campuses were viewed as kind of extensions. Now, that probably carried on too long. UCLA was quite a powerhouse already. San Diego, less so. But, you know, by the time we get to the 21st century, that "We are Berkeley", "We are Berkeley" exceptionalism was pretty much derided by the other campuses. And so, I think that held us back in some ways.

00:18:29 **Ann**

So interesting. The thing that is actually coming into my mind as you're talking about that whole arc is that many people would say that the arc of librarianship is kind of similar, like, clinging to the way it's been done, and we are the only ones that have certain knowledge or capacity or whatever. Which is partly why I'm doing this research, because, some people look at librarians and say they're... "They're so resistant to change," and then some are like, "Oh, they're navigating change so well." I don't know what your thought is, as I say all that…

00:19:09 **David**

The thing about getting older is you tend to be able to see both sides of an argument better. It's not particularly helpful. It doesn't make for a sexy discussion. You know, it's nice when people are positional, but I think there's elements of truth in both of those. I think there is, among not only older librarians, but the profession in general, a desire to cling to the values of the past and a certain resistance to move forward. That said, I think that because of what I'm calling neoliberalization, the changes that have been thrust upon us have tended to disregard the values that underlied those things that we cling so dearly to.

The notion that librarians are the protectors, organizers, and archival people of information, that's a value. And that we share it [information] readily and for free, that's a librarian value. And I think we cling desperately to that. So that when we see things like approval plans, where the vendors who are making the money off of the public university are telling us what books we should buy, it looks like we're averse to change. And it doesn't address the fact that while we may be averse to change, we also cling dearly to those values of preserving and protecting information.

So, I tend to be a bit of what some people would call a Luddite. I think collection development is absolutely essential for a variety of reasons. It's how we stay current with our fields. It's how we

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stay current with our faculty and our students. It's what keeps us engaged with the literature and lets us know what's important. And it also puts us in touch. And I'll tell you, one of the things I'm concerned about is the tendency for information to change without us knowing anything about it.

So, we subscribe to a lot of electronic information these days, and many people want it delivered that way. And I think that's important. We should get information to people the way that they want to receive it. But we don't know necessarily that what we're looking at today is what we were looking at yesterday. The vendors on those databases, they can put in erratum, they can change bibliographies, they can do whatever they want. And, you know, it used to be that we had a print copy of something, we knew we had it, and that print copy was the same one we had 50 years ago. It might have marginalia and other interesting things in it, but the print on the page stayed the same. I don't think we could feel that confident anymore.

So, I think some of the resistance is the fact that at some level, especially as we get older, nobody likes change. I mean, for older people, the change in our lives is generally not good. I think there's a reticence to like jump on board with change in general. But I think there's also a values question that often gets overlooked, especially when we're speaking to library administrators and management. They're like, "Oh, librarians are just resistant to change." But the question is why? Why are we resistant? What are we giving up?

I'm giving you so much more than you really asked for, Ann. But we talked about switching over from Millennium to Ex Libris. So, Ex Libris is an Israeli-owned firm. We use it system-wide. Who owns the search data on Ex Libris? Like, we do a search, you do a search, my wife, a scholar at the university does a search, who owns that search?

00:23:05 **Ann**
It all goes into AI? I don't actually know.

00:23:08 **David**
Well, wouldn't you, if you had AI, want to know what Nobel Laureate X was doing their current research on? That becomes a pretty valuable source of information. Well, Nobel Laureates aren't asking that question, by and large. Librarians aren't asking that question. We used to be the great purveyors of user confidentiality. We never gave…the FBI would come into libraries and say, "What books was so and so looking at", and we'd go to jail before we'd give that information out.

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[But] we just handed it all over to Ex Libris lock, stock and barrel, and a whole lot more, including the searches that faculty are doing.

I don't know what I want to say with that, but I think it leads to this kind of deprofessionalization of librarians as a profession. We don't control that information anymore. We don't mediate it. We're not asked to mediate it any longer. And so, the functions that we're being asked to do are of, kind of going two directions. One direction is like highly specialized, right? So quantitative-qualitative analysis. By and large, no one asked us to do that. They want the data. They sure as hell want us to pay for the data. But they don't want us to mediate the data. That's a role that we've kind of assumed for ourselves to retain our professionalism. We had a period during COVID at the University of California where we were mediating all the requests for books, e-requests [electronic format requests], to find out if they were available electronically. Now this is something that a librarian doesn't need to do. A staff person can readily do this. You don't need a trained librarian for this. But we were kind of pushed in that direction too. So, we're pushed in the direction of deprofessionalization. “Hey, can you look up books and see if they're available electronically?”

That's not a very efficient use of our skill set. And we were pushed into areas that we're not particularly skillful at. So, you know, you, Ann, you were the quantitative social sciences librarian, and I imagine many students came to you and asked you how to do databases, but that was largely because of your unique historical experience. I would argue that that might not be a librarian's job—for students to be getting help on how to use the data. Where to find the data, that's a librarian's job. How to access the data, that's a librarian's job.

[Take the] Privileges [Department. And], we've certainly made a nice little cottage industry out of our electronic scholarship, and we've got quite a big department over there doing that right now. I don't know, we have lawyers elsewhere in the university that might have been able to help us with that. I don't know if that was something that we necessarily needed to embrace as fully as we did. And at the same time, you say we don't need subject expertise.

So now our faculty are walking in there going, “Hey, Eifler, what do you know about architecture?” “Uh, not much.” “What's the latest read in architecture?” “Well, I read a couple reviews. I can tell you this, but I don't have any foundation in that field.” So, I think I went down that tangent, didn't I?

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00:26:50 **Ann**

Thank you. That's fantastic. I think one of the concerns now is if we keep losing staff and we get down to four social sciences librarians, you literally cannot be up to speed on all of the different disciplines.

00:27:08 **David**

But I would argue. I agree 100% with what you just said. But why do we keep losing? We're not losing staff, actually. The non-librarian staff is diminishing, but not as quickly as librarians. We had, at one point, we had Beth Dupuis, [the AUL] [Associate/Assistant University Librarian] who oversaw all of the libraries. Before her, there were two—there was a subject specialty librarian AUL, and there was the library's AUL. [Then for some time it was just Beth.] And then 2008 hit. We consolidated all that, and something needed to happen there. So, what we did is we went from one AUL, and we set up the structure for each of the domains: STEM, biological sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities. [Each] had a division head, my supervisor. Org charts [added] division head. And then within that, we had operations managers within the division heads. And now I see that within many of the divisions, we're getting instruction specialists who are in… much of their job is responsible for administration.

So, these are decisions that have been made. Whereas, you know, way back in the day, when I first arrived 17 years ago, you had an architecture librarian, who, in addition to that, was in charge of that library and had many of the administrative functions. So, in an attempt to kind of consolidate and rationalize that structure, we removed all of that work from librarians, put way too much work on one librarian, and then when we realized it was way too much, replicated a structure that's so much more burdened with overhead that we don't have capacity for the Library to hire librarians.

Plus, we're a pesky bunch from a management point of view. I mean, I wouldn't want to manage us. We're intelligent, we're thoughtful. We have a very high sense of values, which is taught to us in the training programs that we go to, to get our master's degree, and is reiterated through our professional associations. We don't back down. We're a pain. We're a pain in the butt. So, "Let's get rid of those guys. Do we need them? You know, maybe AI can order these books better than these guys ever did, and they don't complain. It'll work 24 hours a day." I don't know. I think that's how they're getting rid of pesky employees.

00:29:51 **Ann**

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I also sometimes think that Berkeley attracts pesky people, speaking for myself, but that's a whole different discussion. Okay, for the transcript, David is raising his hand [Laughs].

00:30:04 **David**
Guilty as charged.

00:30:06 **Ann**
So I'm totally enjoying this conversation, but I do want to focus in a little bit. Like, we're still kind of big picture. I wonder if you can think of an instance, to get back to this navigating change, where you had something hit you? Like, you just got the news, "Okay, now there's gonna be this sea change." It could be COVID, but I think I'm a little interested in before, because maybe a lot of the people reading the transcript won't be as familiar with pre-COVID times where you just were hit with this sea change and had to regroup. And what was that like? And how did you approach it?

00:30:45 **David**
Well, I think I alluded to it when we went from having a planning librarian, a landscape librarian, an architecture librarian, to having one planning librarian, arguably the smaller of those three fields, the smallest of those three fields. And I was it. I had to navigate that. We lost staff at the same time. It was the 2008 financial crisis. That actually happened in 2012 or 11 when I inherited all of that. Yeah, 2011, when I inherited all of that. But we were still reeling from the financial crisis.

Because I'd come from the business world, we sat down with the staff that remained and did a SWOT analysis—a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analysis—to find out what we could stop doing. A lot of it came down to historic work that we had been doing. We had something like, I don't know, 80 LibGuides [Library research guides (LibGuides is the software they are currently hosted on)]. They weren't LibGuides at the time, they were web-based guides. But they were basically LibGuides. And it was like, "Okay, which ones of these are we no longer going to maintain?" So, we went through and did that. "What about our hours? When is it really relevant for us to be open? When do we need to be here? What kind of work shall we do? Shall we update our web pages all the time? Shall we look for new platforms?" Because at that point, each and every subject library was maintaining its own web pages, with some support from the larger library. Then for myself it was like, "Okay, well, you're a pretty good planning

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librarian. You're a terrible architecture librarian. Really don't know much of anything about landscape." So how are you going to come up to speed on that?

And given that we had just lost one of the preeminent architectural librarians in the United States, how are you going to live with the fact that you will never be that person? I had a lot of faculty come in and say to me, "You're not Elizabeth." Fortunately, I'm from the east coast. We have a little bit of attitude. I said, "I never said I was, and never hoped to be and never could be. How can I help you? You know, you don't get to go back there and bring her back. She retired. She was ready to go. I'm sorry I'm not her, but I am who I am." But, that was like an expectation that had to be reduced on the part of the faculty.

Now the nice thing is, again, a generation of students is four years… in four years, they didn't know what they were missing. [Even] some of the graduate students didn't know what they were missing. I think we rely on that to a certain extent when we come to COVID and we close down reference desks… Initially there's no reference desk. But after we get through COVID, nobody knew what a reference desk was. They hadn't left their parents' houses for two and a half years. So, we moved away from that. And then that brings me to another kind of a-ha, or maybe uh-oh moment. (I'm really interested to see how that transcribes, a-ha moment versus an uh-oh moment.) The whole thing of closing down reference desks, for whatever reason, good reason, bad reason, I don't think it was a good thing.

It was like, "Oh, my God, this is a thing that I love." I think this is a thing that librarians loved, being useful to students. We don't make great money. I never complained about the money we made. It was always adequate. We don't make great money. What we did, the wonder of having a student come in with their parent at graduation and bringing their parents by to meet you because you had been so helpful to them, I didn't need money for that. But when you took that away from me, then I really felt like kind of, what am I doing? And I think for our younger colleagues, they may not ever have had that. That, or a faculty person who said, "You know, I'm doing this research and you really helped me. You got me these books and this." And they spent half an hour talking about their research, and [I'd] be like, hmm, this is really interesting. And you'd like throw three other sources, often from left field, at them and they'd be like, "This is great." And then they publish their book. And there you are. Listed in the acknowledgments as someone who helped them out. Come on, there's no money that could ever pay for that kind of help. So, to see that alienated from the work that we did, that was a big a-ha moment.

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This sounds a little bit like casting shade, but, I want to be frank because I think it's important to be honest in these conversations. We have an instructional department that moved away from a model of in-person instruction to online mediated Google Form or Google Doc instruction. There's so much that's missed there. I'll give you an example of an instructional opportunity that came my way that proved to be like, really important and kind of seminal.

My wife teaches a course in public health, environmental science, and she said, "Would you mind? We just lost our librarian. I don't know who the new person is. Would you mind coming in and teaching this course? And these are the resources I wanted to look at." So, we sat down and talked about it and I said, "You know what I'd like to do? Because I'm not that familiar with your field, I'm not that familiar with public health at all, other than what you bring home from work. Why don't we do a two-phase thing? We'll do a worksheet where they can work through it at their pace. And I'll make sure that they work through all of the sources that I'm not that familiar with but that you want them to know. And then we'll do an in-person instruction where we'll bring up additional resources and we'll do it as a flipped instruction where the students will break out into 20 groups. (It was a class of 200.) And they'll each look at one of these resources and they'll report back on it. I'll have slides where I'll show them what we think is the most important part of that particular database."

It was phenomenally successful, worked really well. We had a lot of fun with it because it was always fun to reveal that we were husband and wife at the end. And the students would go, aww, you know, very cute [Ann laughs]. It was a lot of fun. But additionally, we did a survey with the students and asked them what they liked about the homework assignment. And one of the questions on the survey was: how long did the assignment take you to do? And the average, I don't know, was an hour and 15 minutes or something like that. Some people whipped it out in 20 minutes. This was also meant to address the problem that we have in library instruction where some students have seen a library instruction person three or four times before and others have never seen anybody.

And so how do you level up to that? That was part of what the homework assignment was supposed to do. In any case, we saw about five or six people in a class of 200 say that they had spent six or seven hours on the library instruction. And I thought, "This is really, really aberrant. What is going on?" I asked my wife, and we had tied the students' names to this. So, I don't know if this violates some protocol or whatever, but I said, "What's with these students? Like what's going on?" And she looked at it and thought about it for a while. And we came to the

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realization that these were her DSP [Disabled Students' Program] students or disability students who, we don't think about this, right, but who had succeeded so far in their careers by working a hell of a lot harder than the average student, putting in more hours. We had totally overlooked that in library instruction. We never thought about it, but we realized that the homework assignment actually gave them something that they could determine the pace of, and figure out what they wanted to get out of it. And so that became really… it was a job for me that the students I'm talking to have a variety of abilities, and I need to be aware of that. When you start to do these Google Form assignments, there's no hope of ever finding out. Well, I won't say there's no hope, but I think it diminishes your capacity to find out the uniqueness of the students and faculty that you're working with. So that was another thing, over time you would see one of these things.

As I said, I put together a document of [things] I would write down, like, "this is terrible". It's probably got 30 items on it of, "I can't believe the profession is doing this now." If you want, I'll read it off into your transcript at some point, if we have time for that.

00:40:17 **Ann**
So, David, would you like to read it now?

00:40:21 **David**
I would. [Laughs.]

00:40:23 **Ann**
Please do so. I welcome that.

00:40:27 **David**
I have to say this was written largely in anger when something would happen. And as you can tell, I'm pretty passionate about librarianship, pretty passionate about the University of California, Berkeley and all of that. But, when something would really frustrate me, I would just write it down to kind of get it out.

I call it "Neo-Libbing the Library". Like, "How did this happen?" All right—

[AG Note: Numbering added during transcript editing]

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1- There was a bloat of low-level management, and we eliminated frontline services. That's kind of a big… I've been talking about that a lot already.

2- We devalued selection in favor of corporate approval plans. So, we gave over the thing that librarians were really good at, subject expertise, and we turned it over to the people who sell us the stuff. I don't know who thought that was a good idea. Well, never mind. We won't go there.

3- We degraded cataloging services to the point that donors and selectors were forced to pay for cataloging of gifted material. So here we have donors giving us material, and we're like, "Oh, this is wonderful. Thank you." We would go through, look at it. This is material that we didn't have. Valuable material, one-off material, international material, whatever. But cataloging didn't have the resources to catalog, so it stayed hidden. And then we would have to go back and ask the donor of the material, "Hey, you got any money? You know it's going to cost 100 bucks to get this thing catalogued." So, we slowly eroded, or had taken away from us, monographic funding, and we did that by scavenging donor funds. That was really clear that the donor funds that were meant for special one-time purchases came to backfill our traditional, state-funded… And that left us between that and relying on electronic information that costs three to five times as much as opposed to print. It totally scavenged our collection so that our collections became pretty mediocre. We were really hard pressed to bring unique items in.

4- We touted open access and then made big deals, so called "big deals" with corporate vendors. It's more of the same.

5- We bloated our scholarly communications and our communications department. So, in some way it became more about negotiating licenses than purveying information, or, telling our story via communications people rather than just being our story.

6- We hired librarians into non-traditional roles that no one really expected of us. Like quantitative/qualitative data librarians. And then announcing that data and open access was everybody's job. For me, it might [not] have been my job. No one trained me how to do that. So that wasn't particularly helpful.

7- We mandated that the instruction services department not provide in-person instruction. And that was kind of, it wasn't fully mandated but there was definitely a proclivity towards that, that was highly encouraged..

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8- We told librarians that service points or reference desks couldn't be staffed by librarians. I was specifically told, “You cannot recruit librarians to staff your service point. You may not do that.” And when I staffed it by myself, I would have people come in and say “We know what you're doing and we're going to overlook it for now.” The thing that I thought was librarianship was derided to a point where you know, we told librarians, you don't do that.

And then we started staffing them through students. We would take students and put them at the front line at Moffitt and elsewhere. Well, I love students and students are very helpful. One thing we know from librarianship, that when you have a reference interaction, as long as there's another person on the other end, generally both parties walk away happy. Even if you give them crappy information, people walk away happy because you're nice, you're friendly. So, when we have students talking to students, everybody's happy, but they may not be getting the best information.

Let's see…

9- We got into things that I never understood. Again, not to cast shade on any individual, but why are we in the business of staffing a maker space in the library when we can't afford librarians? You know, I understand why public libraries do this. They also give out cook stoves and tools, and I get public librarians doing that. But that used to be kind of the role of the student [services] center would do that stuff. How that became our role I never really understood. And, and I'm sure I, people are going to read this and go, oh, you just don't understand the world.

10- We told our selectors that they no longer had the opportunity to review incoming titles to the main library. They would order them, they'd get integrated into the stacks. But they, the selectors, never had an opportunity to look at the titles and figure out, oh, this vendor that used to be really good is actually putting out a lot of garbage and I don't want to buy, purchase from them anymore.

11- We…I would say… demoralized librarians and library staff to the point that they no longer wanted to come to work by housing them in dungeon-like conditions and removing them from students and faculty. But that's that thing I was talking about before of how much joy we got out of seeing students, families, one thing or another. And then we put them in these cubicle farms

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with little opportunity to see students and faculty and then wonder why people are like, “Well, I don't need to come to work”.

12- We developed at one point a “values statement” that was more of a behavior code, that talked about promoting civility. And while promoting civility is certainly a value that we should adhere to, that was what it was. It was behavior code. I don't even remember if you remember when this came out about four or five years ago, but there was all this talk about a behavioral code—I mean about a value statement—but it wasn't a value statement, it was a behavioral code. And, it didn't talk about preserving information, [or]all the things that we were all trained in…

13- We took our student workers and said, “You're no longer tied to a single library. And you know, you support an entire division of 3, 4, 5 libraries and we can move you around like pieces on a chessboard when it suits us.” Which made sense from an administrative point of view, but it took away the pride of place kind of ownership, which I think a library like Environmental Design always had. Like, “We work in Environmental Design and we do it this way here.” Those were skills that we shared among the division and we learned a lot from other libraries, but the students really felt like, “This is my library”, and, they were the first point of service.

14- I mentioned this before, but, when I wrote it in anger, it came out as: We publicly and privately derided librarians, their professional organizations, and their labor organizations, their unions, by referring to librarian salary increases as “unfunded mandates”. And that was done repeatedly. That was done even after the person who was doing it, our University Librarian at the time, was called on it and asked not to do that. And they continued. So that was towards this deep deprofessionalization.

15- We asked for community input on library closures, and then we ignored it. And we did that pretty effectively. We disregarded the Academic Senate, the Berkeley Faculty Association. LIBR [The UC Berkeley Academic Senate’s Library Committee], the students, anybody else? Well, if you're going to do that kind of thing, don't ask for people's opinions. I mean, there may be necessities that drive it, but don't ask people what they think, because nobody's going to be in favor. No one's going to say, “Oh, yeah, by all means, shut down the library”. Right?

16 - There was a lot of administrative bloat, and it wasn't just in the number of administrators, but it was in their salaries as well. So, when we hired a new university librarian to replace the old university librarian, that salary went up 47%. So, this kind of thing that you see happening in

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corporations, in the private sector, you see it happening in universities where you've got university chancellors and presidents making over a million dollars. I don't think that's at the [University of California] yet, but we're getting pretty close. That kind of filters down all the way through. We saw that happening in the library.

17- We at one point asked librarians to act as security guards to enforce mask mandates at one of our libraries. I don't know how this happened or why this happened or whatever, but as demoralizing as it was to staff to ask students to put on masks in libraries, and I don't doubt that it was, to say that staff should no longer have to do this and librarians needed to gather around a library, not to provide reference service, not to sit at the front door where we could have said, "Hey, do you mind putting a mask on?" Or, you know, manipulated students in the way that we do, but to walk from room to room to room to make sure that students were wearing masks…that was equally demoralizing to librarians. Some of us refused to do it or did it as little as possible.

Let's see if I have any other good ones. This is a really lengthy list, and it'll be done in a second, I promise you.

Ann

I'm good, keep going!

David

18- We reduced the number and the location of exhibits. So, we came up with this highly stylized and formalized process to get the resources to print the posters, to do the exhibits. But we reduced the exhibit size, space. We reduced the number of exhibits a year, all of it, as you know, labor saving, cost saving things. But it was actually something that librarians very much enjoyed doing. And I think our patrons, to a certain extent, enjoyed seeing new exhibits that brought people in the library. We stopped doing that.

19- So, this is very specific, but within our Social Science Division, I used to do a training for all the SLEs [Student Library Employees] at the beginning of the semester, saying, "You know, we are all one. This is how we… This is what makes us social science. This is what defines us. This is what each of the different libraries looks like, and this is how one comports themselves. And, you know, you don't beat up on our patrons because they didn't return a book in time. You know, you are not the TSA…"

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We did that, and then that was kind of said, “We don't want to do that anymore.” So that's when each librarian became very kind of siloed. We had a lot of siloing of libraries and librarians, and the students, even though they were being asked to move from library to library, were not getting a sense of any social science culture. And I think that was an error.

20- The other thing that happened, and this impacted people who had their own libraries like me, the administration stopped providing librarians with information about donors; who donated and how much they donated. So, we used to get that information on a quarterly basis, and we would send letters out, you know, “Dear Donor X, thank you so much for your donation of X amount.” And then I would include photos of, you know, masses of students in the library at finals time or whatever. Or, “This is the great new thing that we did” just as a way to keep them engaged. And we stopped getting that information. And I pushed for about a year, and then they started giving me the information about who had donated again, but not the amounts. So that then kind of leads you to think, “Okay, well, what kind of funny business is going on here that they don't want to tell me how much money was donated to the library?” Ah, that hurt.

21- And then at some point we reduced our hours. And we're seeing that now. I'm not seeing it as much because I'm retired, but I'm hearing about it. We in the Environmental Design Library [had] a donor who was interested in [us]…He came through the College [not the Library, for his donation]. So, this is how I knew how much money he gave. So, the college had a donor who having a fondness for the library, said, “I want to give money to your Environmental Design Library. I had fond memories of it,” et cetera, et cetera. So, they put him in touch and he said, “I have $2,500. What would you do with $2,500?” And we said, “Oh, we'd add another two hours a week onto our schedule.” And I think I forget how we did that. And then he came back with more money. Five thousand, seven thousand five hundred, and then ten thousand. And when we got to that point, we were like, “We'll stay open longer on weekends.” “We'll stay open till 10 o'clock on evenings and weekends.” This was all funded through a donor.

But, now, I don't know what will happen. Now his money comes in. I don't know who's overseeing it. I wouldn't be surprised if the college took it back because everybody's getting a little hungry these days. So again, not only can't I say thank you to the person because I don't know where the donor’s coming from, but I have much less ability to dictate hours and the terms of what our students needed.

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So, all of those things, I think lent to a sense of deprofessionalization and certainly diminished the joy that I took in the job. It was, you know, death by a thousand cuts, kind of, “Oh, I don't get to do this anymore.” So, I see that as the long arc. And I do see a certain dispassion among our younger colleagues. I don't know if that's just my disillusionment projected onto them or if that's genuine, if there is, you know, less of a passion for the field. So, thank you for letting me read my list, Ann.

00:55:58 **Ann**

It is a fantastic list and I wanted to answer every single one, but I'll have to do it over coffee sometime. Okay, so this is not really part of the interview, but when you say that you're seeing a shift in the feelings of younger colleagues… As you know, I have only been at Berkeley for six years, and I think of it as my first classic academic librarian job. But I don't know if you would agree that our dreams and visions of what it was going to be like to finally be an academic librarian, you get there, and that world is not the same anymore.

00:56:40 **David**

I actually got to live the dream, I think, for the first five, six, seven years. These things happen in arcs. It wasn't from day to night. I got to live the dream. And I think some people would say I was unwilling to let go of it.

I kind of swam in my own waters, and I had much more autonomy than I think library administration would have wanted me to have. And I took advantage of that, because I wanted to live the dream. I don't know that any of our younger colleagues, depending upon when they came into the profession, had the opportunity to live that dream. If you don't live the dream,. it's not anything that you can really aspire to. And I do see it professionally. As we looked at mergers of libraries, [at the] University of California, Berkeley—we had quite a few. I don't know, 26, 27— we've merged a number of them or closed them. But that was happening all over the country. I had architecture colleagues, librarians, because we had a small architecture librarian association, who were merged into public policy or were merged [and] became architecture, planning, landscape. That model was replicated, and planning and public policy were together. Or more common was architecture and art merged together, including art history, art practice, and architecture were merged together. So, you saw all of these kinds of mergers happening. I've lost the thread. I'm sorry.

00:58:25 **Ann**

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No, it's okay. I was just saying, talking about the living the dream thing. Part of what is making me so interested in doing this project is that I felt like I lived the dream from 2019 to 2020. I got to Berkeley, and I was like, whoa, fire hose of excitement. I mean, it was amazing.

00:58:46 **David**
And it was walking in through the door with your students and your faculty.

00:58:50 **Ann**
Yes.

00:58:51 **David**
And you're like, "Oh, my God, for me, you're a planner, and you're looking at bioremediation swells on the…" You know, like, wow. I never thought about this, or students… "You're doing your internship in what country? Doing what?" It's like, wow, I hadn't really thought about that. But that is important.

00:59:10 **Ann**
Yeah, but then COVID changed everything, as we know...

00:59:17 **David**
I think COVID accelerated it.

00:59:19 **Ann**
It changed a lot…fair enough. I think I would agree with that. So, you've read me your list, and we've talked about arcs and big pictures and stuff. Were there ever times you thought during the 17 years of leaving? You don't have to answer that if you don't want.

00:59:40 **David**
Oh, yeah, sure. Like every day after a bad meeting [they laugh]. No, not really. Remember, I'd had two prior careers. I'd been a social worker, and I'd been in corporations. And I can honestly say that the best job I ever worked in my 50 years of working was this. Just the ability to be around so many bright, intelligent, thoughtful, caring people. To have access to all of these intellectual resources, whether they be databases or print books or art. No.

Like, where would I go? When I left because I became ill, I knew what I was going to be missing. It was time to go. I'm glad I left when I did because we got in under the wire, and it

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looks like they're going to be filling that headcount slot. So that was one of the things I was concerned about. You never know when the economy is going to go bad, and it did. But we're going to fill that headcount [David's position]. But I'll tell you, there are things that I very much miss, you can imagine. I miss the students. I miss the instruction. I miss the reference. I miss the faculty. I miss the casual hallway conversations. I miss walking into the building and seeing the phenomenal landscape and architecture projects that the students are doing.

I mean, I miss all of that terribly. And yet I think it was time for me to leave. Again, when I think of the amount of time spent in meetings, that I just thought, "This is a total waste of my time," at a certain point, I just realized I'm not helpful to the enterprise anymore. And I was getting close to that point.. So, no, I never. I never really seriously thought about leaving until I could no longer be there.

01:01:34 **Ann**

Thank you for sharing that. I feel like that's the natural time to talk about legacy and advice to the next generation. But I just want to slot one more thing in before I ask about that, which is, I made some notes for myself before we spoke, just about you and how I see you and, the strong voice of solidarity. I wrote: "What did it mean that you got to run your own library versus being situated elsewhere? Passion for the field and autonomy." Those were the things that I felt kind of defined you in my mind. So, what do you think the impact was that you, eventually, for that last 10 years, had "your own library"? I'm doing air quotes.

01:02:29 **David**

Well, it's interesting that you asked that. I think it was very frustrating for management that I was able to do things. I was able to hold exhibits, I was able to hold events that brought community together. And while I did everything by the book, I didn't always ask. I think in a large managed organization, that can be frustrating.

But I think a lot of people will tell you that we had one of the most vibrant libraries on campus. Not only the art, it was a very busy library. Yes, we let some of the strictures down. We allowed people to bring food and drink in and some of the things that libraries are not known for doing, but we also had events. So, we started this hands-on artist book event where we had a collection of artist books. It was relatively modest. We grew it to be a very substantial collection and had a couple exhibits where people said, "I really wanted to touch the book and feel the materiality." So, we brought them out of their cases and on Fridays, and because no one likes working late on

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Fridays, I decided we'd pair it with wine and cheese, and so I could at least sit in the library and have my glass of wine on Friday. And they were very successful events. We brought students together. We brought community people together. We brought artists together. We brought the social science folks who were not necessarily familiar with the arts. It became a gathering spot. We brought other librarians together. So, I think that sense of building community, which is always kind of one of the unspoken things in academic librarianship, we tend to talk about it on the public librarianship side of the house—building community— but I think it's equally important in academic librarianship. I was able to do a lot of that, and we did 30 of them. We actually ended up doing 30 of those. We'd do, like, two a semester or… Yeah, two a semester. Um, I don't know, for seven or eight years did them, and that was great.

They're a little bit opportunistic, too… How are you going to get mad at a librarian who maybe knows nothing about architecture but serves you wine on Friday afternoon?

Ann

[Laughs] It's a dilemma.

David

So, there was a little bit of opportunism dilemma. But, you know, it bought a lot of goodwill within the college, within the student and faculty population, and certainly within the community.

So, I think that autonomy, it's my nature. You've known me for years, Ann, you know, it's something that's taken. You don't ask for autonomy because the answer is going to be "no". You take autonomy. And of course, that is kind of my nature to take it. And I'm sure I stepped on a number of toes that would rather not have been stepped on. But it was for a good purpose. It wasn't self-aggrandizing.

I think that was the legacy, of this notion of building community within a space. And it's ironic. We talk about library as space. We remove books from libraries so we can have more space. But, we don't really think about, well, what is that space? [What] can it be used for?

So, I'll go back to this. The Environmental Design Library always did vendor [no,] donor events, but they would shut down the library. And so, they throw all the students out, bring all the donors in, serve them fried chicken or whatever. They served them some crazy thing. And I, I

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just said, “No, we're not going to do that. We will have, we can have donor events. We'll have them in a section of the library and the library's atrium there, and the donors will be among students.” And actually, I think donors like to be among young people. Most of our donors are older. They kind of like that youthful energy. And the young people, they like that. So, you know, leftover food, it worked really quite well. The donors were happy and we didn't have to cut out services to students.

How do we know what is community? What community are we trying to build? Who do we bring together? I always had a very clear notion that [for] public universities especially, our dollars still do come from the public. We need to serve the public as well as just their kids. And so, I would hope that that would be considered part of my legacy is building a library community.

01:07:32 **Ann**
That's fantastic. Um, I am going to stop the recording, I think, because I'm getting a notice, “Your internet is unstable.”

01:07:42 **David**
Okay.

01:07:43 **Ann**
So just in case, I did want to ask… Well, okay, the notice went away so let me just ask… The final question was, what is your advice for people entering the field now or for early career librarians?

01:07:58 **David**
You know, it's interesting. I don't get that question very much anymore. I used to. We had a lot of mentors, mentees who came through the Environmental Design Library. Now that I'm out of the field, I get that question a lot less. I'll tell you the advice that I'm giving to people who are on the cusp of retiring, including a colleague who's retiring that I just wrote today, which is, ”In your next months in the library, figure out the things that you love doing, like, identify those things that you would get up in the middle of the night and go to the library to do that thing, and focus on doing that for your remaining time in the library, and try and do as little of the other adminis-trivia, if you will, as you can possibly get away with.” And, you know, for this person who's been in their career for decades and decades, they basically don't have to do anything

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anymore, and they can do solely what they love. Obviously, that doesn't work for young people in their careers. It's a good way to get fired.

But, I would say identify the things that you're passionate about, and to the extent that you can incorporate more of that into your work, do it, because that will get you, keep you motivated through hard times. I'm not saying don't do the things that we have to do that are not fun. I'm not saying that… Those are requirements of the job and they have to be done. But really identify, like, what is it that makes you just absolutely excited about your work and do as much of that as you can reasonably do and advance in the career.

01:09:48 **Ann**
Thank you, David. That was fantastic.

01:09:51 **David**
Good.

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