Hi everyone. I’m Shari Laster, Head of Open Stack Collections at ASU Library. I’m a first time Charleston Conference attendee, and just from conversations over the last day or so, I know there’s a lot of interest on what we’re working on at Arizona State University. So I’m happy to be here, and honored to co-present with Bert and Rebecca.
Lorrie McAllister is the co-PI on this project, and she wanted to be here today, but couldn’t. I’ve been at ASU about 9 3/4ths months, and serve as the Future of Print project coordinator. For a more in-depth exploration of the project’s vision, I recommend checking out our very recently-published chapter in Charleston Voices 2017, which takes as its point of exploration the talk that our University Librarian, Dr. Jim O’Donnell, gave at this conference last year.
Jim's fundamental question driving our work is “which books? where?” To give you a sense of how we’re striving to answer these questions, I’ll talk a bit about the current environment for the library at ASU, then move to a discussion about ways in which we’re thinking about print collections as services, and end with a short provocation on what is yet to come.
The primary driver behind this work at ASU is a little project we call “Hayden 2020.”
This is an artist’s rendering of what we expect Hayden Library to look like when it’s fully open to our community in early 2020. Hayden Library, a 252,670-square-foot library located at the center of ASU’s Tempe campus, serves over 50,000 students enrolled in residential programs. While expanding classroom and study space is an important part of this renovation project, so too is thinking flexibly and creatively about what our collections should look like. A smaller collections footprint asks us to consider how we go from collections as a backdrop to collections as a service we provide within the physical space of this building. And we intend to use this insight to transform collections at all eight library branches on the four campuses that comprise ASU.
engagement: open stack collections

So, how do we do that? We’re still figuring this out.
In 2017, ASU Library received funding from the Andrew W Mellon Foundation to explore this future. In collaboration with MIT Libraries and other interested stakeholders, ASU developed a white paper describing a framework for envisioning new “open stack” collections. With an additional, generous three-year grant from Mellon, we are now actively exploring ways in which this ideas can be enacted in practice. Our focus in 2018 has been twofold – to identify and explore what “engagement” means with collections at a human-sized scale, and to explore the ways in which data about our collections can be leveraged for answering the large-scale question of what goes where. And here’s where I will be very clear, we don’t have findings to report yet! But I can share a little about what we’re learning, at least for the human-scale question.
This wacky collection is the first in a series of mini-projects our Future of Print team has developed and implemented. What you’re looking at here is a collection of poetry (mostly American, mostly 20th and 21st century), located at Fletcher Library on ASU’s West Campus in Glendale, AZ. You may notice something funny about how the books are shelved. (Well, I think it is hilarious.) We used this project, which we dubbed “Surprise Me!” to ask students how they felt about books in the library, and held a focus group where we fed students nachos and listened to what they had to say. The point wasn’t to get people to check out books, and no, we are not going to shelve books backward in Hayden 2020! The point was to provoke thought and reaction, and you can see from our emoji assessment board, we accomplished that.
Another project we’ve completed is “Health Humanities Horizons,” hosted at the ASU branch library at the Downtown Phoenix campus. We leveraged existing liaison librarian relationships with faculty to seek input on what would comprise a compelling introduction to the health humanities, in conjunction with a new certificate program at ASU. A number of faculty were more than happy to help, suggesting books, movies, music, and other materials that offer a transdisciplinary peak into this field. We are using what we learned from this process to come up with better ways to invite teaching faculty to participate in collections selection and display. There are more projects in process now, and a whole slate identified for Spring 2019. For each project, we’re producing a reflective and holistic analysis, a collections data set, and a toolkit for future applications. As these reports are finished, we will look for ways to share widely.
looking ahead: networks for the long term

And that brings me to my final point, what’s next. Of course a lot of energy is going into the Hayden 2020 collections work so that we can be ready to move books as soon as we get into the building, but we want to have an eye on the future.
Lorrie and I both agree with Jim that this future is a shared future. Access to the academic and scholarly record is of essential importance for the long term. It’s only something of an overgeneralization to say that today’s secondary sources are tomorrow’s primary sources. Already, consortia are answering this question with collaborative collection development projects suited to their contexts. The Internet Archive and other non-profits also have an interest in print collection development. What’s the print collection that undergirds DPLA? How do we ensure that what we’re already learning about shared print archiving will be usefully applied to the scholarship that’s happening right now?
One step in understanding possible congruencies is to articulate and share the context in which library collections are taking place. We’ve developed an aspirational case study outline, posted to our project website, and are currently in the process of using it as a self-study tool. Although it’s taking longer than we expected, because everything does, we hope to share our own case study to use as a conversation tool with potential collaborators in the future.
So to glibly answer my earlier question – strategy. It’s all about strategy.
And with that, I’ll refer you to our project website. I’m also happy to discuss our work at nearly endless length, so feel free to get in touch!