



LAURA BUSH 21st CENTURY LIBRARIAN PROGRAM

Sample Application RE-260023-OLS-26
Project Category: Applied Research

American University

Amount awarded by IMLS: \$428,716
Amount of cost share: \$0

American University's Washington College of Law, in partnership with NC State University's Open Knowledge Center and researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of South Carolina, North Carolina Central University, and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, will investigate the relationship between librarian practice and the thoughtful implementation of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The project team will explore roles librarians should play, copyright expertise they might need, and other potential curriculum to address new technological and legal challenges. This applied research project will help librarians, and the LIS programs that train them, meet the need for legal and policy training to serve their core mission as experts in information policy for emerging technologies such as AI.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

When preparing an application for the next deadline, be sure to follow the instructions in the most recent Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program to which you are applying.

Law and Policy Literacies for Librarians as AI Experts: Mapping Training Needs and Institutional Context for Librarians

Introduction

American University Washington College of Law requests a two-year **\$428,716 LB21 Applied Research Grant**. Our team of copyright and information policy experts will partner with NC State University's Open Knowledge Center and researchers at four leading Library and Information Science (LIS) graduate programs—University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of South Carolina, North Carolina Central University, and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign—to investigate three research questions:

1. What role should librarians play in the thoughtful implementation of AI in research and education?
2. What copyright expertise is necessary for librarians to enable efficient adoption of AI, meet training needs for patrons and staff, and navigate changes to subscriptions, platforms, and business models driven by AI?
3. What curriculum would best prepare librarians to adopt a more proactive, mission-focused posture in the face of new technological and legal challenges?

Librarians have deep expertise in understanding research databases, electronic resources, and metadata as well as a high degree of community trust and engagement. This research will help librarians, and the LIS programs that train them, meet the need for legal and policy training to serve our core mission as experts in information policy for emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI). The results contemplated include research publications, an education needs assessment, curriculum, and model resources that reflect that research. This project will run from September 1, 2026–August 31, 2028. This project aligns with Agency Goal 1.2, “Support the training and professional development of the museum and library workforce” and OLS’s call for projects that “Creatively and effectively use new technologies, including artificial intelligence, to improve both academic practices and visitor experiences at our nation’s libraries.”

Project Justification

Librarians play an established and central role as copyright experts ([Secker and Morrison, 2019](#)) and custodians of data and databases. ([Bonn, Bolick, and Cross, 2023](#)). As core library activities have shifted from settled practices with physical books and journals to unsettled and rapidly-evolving practices with digital materials and platforms, librarians are called on to make new determinations about how to provide guidance and access to materials in a manner that meets the mission of their institution as well as the researchers and students they serve. This has created two sets of related problems:

- 1) Librarians are a core source of guidance for individuals and institutions facing deepening challenges about digital only materials, licensing, and artificial intelligence but LIS education on copyright and related areas of information policy is not structured to meet the magnitude of new challenges faced.
- 2) AI has accelerated ongoing changes in market structures, subscription models, and digital scholarship practices without an accompanying change in LIS education, policy, and practice to meet library mission.

This has left libraries in the position of playing catch-up—trying to preserve their role as guides and collection managers where the traditional balance between private incentives and public interest have been disrupted. With new tools like AI further accelerating these challenges and presenting new opportunities, librarians need a comprehensive, reimagined copyright and information policy education as a core part of their pre-service training, aligned with support for lifelong learning. There is currently important work being done to support general library engagement with AI ([LG-256565-OLS-24](#)) and use of AI to support open education ([LG-256616-OLS-24](#)). But a major gap remains in support for the legal and policy expertise needed to evaluate new uses of AI and their uses in digital collections to meet the needs of the communities they serve. As public opinion of AI technologies continues to be highly polarized, librarians remain a trusted source of guidance about information policy. Librarians can play a key role in advancing the public engagement with AI from an all or nothing initial reaction to a meaningful evaluation of when and how AI technologies can be useful.

Our team is well positioned to do this work - we are building on successful education and policy research on copyright and AI

To be effective, guidance for librarians must build on research about the real (not hypothetical) questions they are asked and problems they face in their regular work. We have seen success in this approach in our work with the open education community. We conducted research about where copyright information gaps and risk avoidance were negatively influencing pedagogy—where authors were leaving out key examples or quotations because they didn’t have the confidence in their copyright and fair use knowledge. We worked within the community to conduct field and legal research, released the [Best Practices in Fair Use for Open Educational Resources \(OER\)](#), and continue to support its adoption today. Over the past five years we have seen a clear shift in the confidence of educators to rely on fair use to meet the teaching mission of the OER they create and use.

Because many discussions of AI technology are grounded in questions about copyright and creativity, we have built on our previous work with three different AI policy projects for educators and librarians over the course of 2024–2026:

- A series of six workshops within the OER community focused on educators’ experience and best practice with AI that led to a set of well-attended community webinars
- A series of twelve workshops with the Driving OER Sustainability for Student Success (DOERS) Collaborative of state and regional open policymakers culminating in a [published report](#)
- A curriculum for responsible use of generative AI, funded by a Google Academic Resource Award

For librarians to be prepared to evaluate emerging practices, they need a broad and integrated understanding of how different areas of law and policy work and interact. Without that rigorous preparation, librarians dealing with “messy” real world challenges are pushed to overcaution, which results in worse outcomes for patrons and institutions. (Fernandez-Molina, J., Martinez-Avila, D., Guimares, J. & Silva, E. 2022). As copyright educators in LIS programs and professional development programs, we have seen first hand the challenges created by this lack of support and the

need for education that systematically addresses the current reality of born digital content, licensing, and terms of service.

Copyright education is a necessary but under-developed part of the LIS curriculum and existing professional development materials and networks provide only patchwork coverage to meet rising demand

Even though copyright and information policy topics are recognized as a core competency for librarians ([ALA, 2023](#)) and are critical for engaging with emerging tools like AI these topics are not regularly taught as a part of LIS curriculum. As scholars such as Cross, & Edwards (2011); Fernandez-Molina, J., Martinez-Avila, D., Guimares, J. & Silva, E. (2022); and Kawooya, Ferullo, and Lipinski (2019) have noted, “issues pertaining to copyright education remain marginal in the library and information science (LIS) curriculum and research.” Some professional development efforts offer triage support for librarians in this area but they are generally *ad hoc*, focusing on narrow and “just in time” problem-solving, rather than comprehensive pre-service education in what the American Library Association (ALA) identifies as a “foundational skill” for all librarians. The urgent need for library professionals to have thorough, systematic instruction in copyright has also been documented by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions in their [Statement on Copyright Education and Copyright Literacy](#) (2018). Indeed, copyright competence is just one element of a critical engagement with AI implementation and policy, but without this foundational building block, it is hard to map out other intersecting information policy choices. Further, an in-depth engagement with copyright law provides a context for related areas of policy, including plagiarism and credit, attribution, and authorship, as well as marking, citation, and licensing. Education in this area must begin with a foundation of formal preservice training that equips librarians to engage with crosscutting issues like AI, rather than backfilled with *ad hoc* professional development sessions.

The target group for this work is LIS students, along with LIS educators who support copyright literacy, both in the small number of devoted courses described by scholars such as Cross and Edwards (2012) and in the much larger body of adjacent courses that address copyright issues as they relate to topics such as archiving, scholarly communication, and library instruction. These adjacent courses make up the vast majority of copyright education for LIS students since they are often required for all students, unlike elective copyright-specific courses (Schmidt and English, 2015). This is particularly true for new and emerging courses such as those covering scholarly communication, new technologies (such as AI), and new business models and platforms. (Bonn, Cross, and Bolick, 2020). Our work also targets LIS administrators and decision-makers as they shape and revise curricula. Scholars such as Kawooya et al (2019) explicitly call for a greater level of coordination among programs, to share best practices and agree upon minimal standards for the core curriculum of copyright courses and this research is intentionally designed to meet those needs.

The ultimate beneficiary of this research will be LIS programs, library students, and the institutions that they will lead as they join the field. With updated guidance and coordination support, librarians can meet their own mission and serve as the voice and organizing nucleus for the interests of others, such as students, educators, and the public who are in

urgent need of reliable and concrete guidance about how to productively engage with AI. They will also be prepared to engage with policy debates around AI, information policy, and copyright such as information provenance and privacy. This research, which directly forwards LB21's core goals, will "develop and enhance professional development and training programs to enable the library and archival workforce to meet the needs of their communities."

Project Work Plan

In order to address these challenges, our team of experts in legal literacies and library policy will collaborate with experts at four leading LIS programs, each of whom have provided letters of support:

- Dr. Dick Kawooya at the University of South Carolina
- Professor Sara Benson and Dr. Melissa Ocepek at the University of Illinois
- Dr. Patrick Roughen at North Carolina Central University
- Co-PI Cross who is an instructor at UNC Chapel Hill

Together, we are a team of leading researchers in this area and represent a critical mass of dedicated legal and policy educators in LIS programs, including lead instructors for 4 of the 11 identified copyright-specific courses offered in LIS today. We are currently piloting AI-specific courses such as Cross's INLS 690: *AI, Law, and the Struggle for Control of Knowledge* being offered at UNC Chapel Hill in the spring of 2026. These stakeholders have been involved in the process throughout its development and their participation will include active partnership in research design, conducting research, data analysis, and reporting.

In collaboration, we have developed a program of qualitative research. At every stage, our surveys, interviews, and focus groups will include a broad set of librarians, administrators, and patrons and we will specifically partner with a broad set of LIS programs. We will partner with professional development programs such as the Author's Alliance and the Library Copyright Institute to assure that our preservice work is aligned with broader support for lifelong learning

This work will address three core research questions:

1. What role should librarians play in the thoughtful implementation of AI in research and education?

In order to develop the coordination, best practices, and standards described by scholars such as Kawooya et al (2019), our research team, comprising legal experts and researchers from four of the leading LIS programs, will review and analyze three sources of information: LIS courses focused on copyright, policy, and AI; public statements from libraries; and interviews with librarians who support AI use. We will begin with an environmental scan and content analysis of course syllabi from the full list of ALA-accredited LIS programs and review public statements from libraries and library organizations. These will both be shared in a dynamic database. In the fall of 2026 we will recruit and hire our Project Research Manager and the full research team will begin content analysis of these public documents. We will share these findings through webinars and scholarly publications in 2027 and 2028.

Informed by these findings we will begin designing research instruments in the winter of 2026. We will interview librarians who work closely with patrons on law, policy, and AI issues as well as library administrators who are establishing policy. Throughout this process we will use snowball sampling in initial interviews to identify other experts to broaden our interviews, which will be conducted online to reduce barriers to participation. We anticipate speaking with at least 50 librarians and administrators in this phase.

Activity	Timeline	Target Communities	Core Research Team
Gather and review policies	Fall 2026	Public policy documents	Full team
Develop database of LIS courses and syllabi	Fall 2026	Public websites and emails to identified instructors	Full team
Librarian interviews	Winter 2026–27	Librarians who work on AI issues	Full team

2. What copyright expertise is necessary for librarians to enable efficient adoption of AI, meet training needs for patrons and staff, and navigate changes to subscriptions, platforms, and business models driven by AI?

With a clear picture of the library's role, we will be prepared to research what specific skills and resources must be provided for librarians to fill that role. To understand this, we will map not only librarians' experiences with generative AI, but also the limitations presented by their institutional context. Education must reflect the institutional context and professional networks where library work takes place. Time pressures, resource limitations, and understanding of mission and professional expectations (Wakaruk, A., Gareau-Brennan, C., & Pietrosanu, M., 2021) vary for academic, public, and school librarians. To understand these needs we will conduct initial surveys with librarians working in three specific types of libraries to understand how their training can be aligned with their professional contexts—paying particular attention to public and school librarians and librarians without clear lines of institutional support. We are currently doing pilot work with academic librarians through open education communities such as Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) and DOERS and with school librarians through a partnership with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. These surveys will seek information about which different opportunities might be available, e.g. while school librarians may not be involved in subscription discussions, they may be involved in implementation and teacher guidance for their ability to use AI tools. In order for our research and recommendations to be useful, those recommendations cannot be one-size-fits-all.

This research will be conducted by dedicated subgroups of the team, as described in the tables at the end of each section, which will focus on specific communities: academic, school, and public librarians. These subgroups will be built on the specific strengths of team members such as Illinois iSchool's deep connection with school librarians, and

Cross' connection with rural and under-resourced institutions through his work at a Land Grant institution and as co-lead of the Library Copyright Institute.

This work will be done in partnership with professional organizations including the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and ALA, who have offered their support for this project. Both organizations have rich histories offering support for literacy around emerging technologies and will be instrumental in gathering information, connecting with practicing librarians, and disseminating our results throughout this process. We will also partner with the Author's Alliance, which has taken a leading role in supporting library understanding and engagement with AI law and policy.

In the winter and spring of 2027, we will also conduct structured interviews and 8-12 focus groups with librarians and educators identified in our survey responses and using snowball sampling, as well as targeted outreach based on alumni networks of our LIS program partners. This research will be conducted primarily online with targeted engagement at national gatherings such as those listed below.

As part of this research, we will gather information about librarians' experiences with institutional gatekeepers and policymakers with whom they interact while making information policy decisions. While university and school administration is generally outside the scope of this project, ignoring those interests and constraints would limit the real-world impact of this research. Most of the existing professional development and networks that support library copyright and information policy work focus on academic and research libraries and the options available to those librarians. This project will continue to work with those communities, as they are the vanguard for this work, but as identified in our previous work on copyright training and open education ([RE-250053-OLS-21](#)), we have to gather information about different types of professional experiences.

We will also conduct at least 10 law and library expert interviews to identify emerging areas of legal risk and potential areas of mission-oriented (legal-expertise-enabled) opportunities. We will explore how stated competencies align with AI use, what gaps exist, and what current and emerging cases are posing the most complex challenges.

All results will be made openly available in disciplinary repositories, published in the scholarly literature, and reported in public webinars. We will select specific venues aligned with each community. For academic libraries we will focus on scholarly journals such as *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* (JLSC) and present at conferences such as ALA and Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL). We will reach school librarians through venues such as *School Library Journal* and *School Library Research* (American Association of School Librarians (AASL)'s open access journal) and conferences such as AASL's national conference and targeted regional events. For public librarians, we will aim to present at the Public Library Association (PLA) Annual and to publish in *Public Libraries Magazine* and with PLA's trade journals, which have a wider readership among practitioners. Throughout the process we will work to offer webinars and podcasts with ALA and the relevant disciplinary

organizations (ACRL, AASL, and PLA). We will also work with the Authors Alliance to share results through their blog and public webinars.

Activity	Timeline	Target Communities	Core Research Team (in addition to PIs)
Survey and follow-up interviews on alignment with professional context—academic librarians	Winter - Spring 2027	Academic librarians	South Carolina (Kawooya), NC Central (Roughen)
Survey and follow-up interviews on alignment with professional context—school librarians	Winter - Spring 2027	School librarians	Illinois (Benson, Ocepek), UNC (Cross)
Survey and follow-up interviews on alignment with professional context—public librarians	Winter - Spring 2027	Public librarians	Illinois (Benson, Ocepek)
Expert interviews to identify emerging areas of legal risk	Winter - Spring 2027	Technology and policy experts	Jacob and Cross will lead

3. What curriculum would best prepare librarians to adopt a more proactive, mission-focused posture in the face of new technological and legal challenges?

We believe that accurate and clear education in AI law and policy will help build a framework of professional confidence that will better prepare LIS students for the real world they face. Our third research question is how to best structure a curriculum so it balances being grounded in the specific examples and cases of practice, but also provides a conceptual framework to place and analyze new cases and emerging problems.

Based on this research we will develop, assess, and iteratively improve a proposed curriculum for coordinated education in AI aligned with core library expertise such as emerging technology, information literacy, and law and policy. This curriculum will be packaged with a pilot set of model open educational resources (OER) that demonstrate the concrete opportunities for teaching core topics and emerging practice. This work builds on our existing [Best Practices in Fair Use for Open Educational Resources](#) (2021) which focuses on providing practitioners with a model for analyzing new use cases within a decision making framework built on the regular professional practices of librarians; as well as on our recently published report for DOERS: [Policy Priorities for Generative AI and Open Education](#) (2025) which focuses on practical frameworks for engagement with AI.

These problem-based OER will be developed [using design-based research](#) (Rawson, C. and Hughes-Hassell, S., 2015) as short model resources that address a discrete question or practice. These will often be focused on emergent topics such as AI licensing, AI's role in information management, and library programming that provides ethical frameworks

for engaging with AI tools. They may also address cross cutting topics at the intersection of discrete areas of law such as contract negotiation in support of student privacy or the role of fair use in AI training and developments.

We will develop materials in coordination with our LIS partners in the spring and summer of 2027 with an aim to pilot those materials in courses offered at our partner graduate programs in the fall of 2027 and spring of 2028 semesters. As we identify other relevant courses and instructors in our interviews we will invite them to participate in the pilots as appropriate. Assessment of these pilots will be done through student evaluations and interviews with instructors. In this phase we hope to speak with 5-10 instructors and roughly 50 students.

Our pre-service curriculum should be evaluated by and aligned with leading professional development projects to maximize quality and impact

In addition, we will partner with the leading professional development programs serving the LIS community such as such as the Open Copyright Education Advisory Network (OCEAN), the Library Copyright Institute, University Information Policy Officers group, Copyright First Responders, and SPARC, where co-PI Cross is currently co-lead of the [SPARC OA 101 series](#). We will also tap into our deep connections with the open education community to share and assess these resources. These organizations have been selected because they are established and trusted sources for professional development, which must be aligned with our pre-service materials. Our goal will be to connect and align our models for training with all of these existing programs to avoid duplication and develop coordinated efforts that make the most of the strengths of all programs. We will also share the materials for review by a set of non-expert instructors and librarians including instructors in non-AI courses who need to use these materials to fill in gaps related to AI in their courses. In this phase we plan to connect with five major professional development programs and at least 10 instructors working in courses parallel to this work.

In the spring of 2028 we will convene a two-day symposium to share our findings and solicit stakeholder feedback on our draft blueprint and outreach coordination. Both Jacob and Cross have hosted similar symposia in the past for programs such as the [OER+SC project \(LG-72-17-0132-17\)](#) and developing library-led models for negotiating edtech agreements ([RE-256567-OLS-24](#)). In 2025 we also held a policy convening supported by a [Google Academic Research Award](#), “A Curriculum on Responsible AI and Information Policy for Educators.” We have included a [draft agenda](#) of the symposium as a supporting document. We anticipate holding this event in Raleigh, NC at the James B. Hunt Jr. Library, which has been used for similar events in past IMLS-funded projects.

Data gathered throughout this work will include content analysis, survey responses, transcribed interviews and focus groups, and assessment of the problem-based OER. These will be gathered through qualtrics survey tools, recorded zoom interviews, and in secure google documents and spreadsheets. Analysis will be done through rigorous qualitative analysis. We will seek IRB review and approval as required and carefully safeguard participants’ privacy throughout the process.

We will share updates and results regularly throughout the process in scholarly venues, public and social media posts, and an ongoing webinar series hosted by American University, Washington College of Law (AUWCL) in partnership with relevant organizations. All materials will be shared openly in disciplinary repositories such as The LIS Scholarship Archive (LISSA), CHEER: Copyright in Higher Education Elements Resources, and the Scholarly Communication Notebook, and ultimately hosted on the AUWCL project page with mirrors as appropriate offered through our organizational and LIS program partners.

Activity	Timeline	Target Communities	Core Research Team
Develop final report and curriculum and share for review	Spring - Summer 2027	Review by LIS participating instructors and non-experts	Full team
Rapid pilot and review of OER in professional development communities	Summer - Fall 2027	OCEAN, Library Copyright Institute, UIPO, others identified	Full team
Pilot in named courses	Fall 2027 - Spring 2028	UNC (Cross), Illinois (Benson), NCCU (Roughen), SC (Kawooya) and others as identified	Full team
Symposium	Summer 2028	LIS educators and administrators	Full team

Project Results

The intended results for this project are a clear and concrete understanding of what librarians need to know about copyright and policy for mission-driven use and training around AI and a systematic plan for education. At a time when the constituent issues—the incorporation of AI tools in librarianship, a reckoning with platformization of resources, the need to offer accurate and actionable support to patrons—could not be more timely or the need for library expertise more urgent librarians need to be equipped to understand and respond to these developments as they happen.

Our research will be shared through scholarly publications and presentations at major library conferences such as ALA and ACRL. We will also present at copyright- and policy-specific library and education conferences such as the Kraemer Copyright Conference and the Miami University Libraries Copyright Conference. We will offer webinar series throughout the project as we have done for our current work related to the Code of Best Practice for Fair Use in OER and DOERS report on values-led policy for AI in libraries and education. All materials will be openly-licensed and hosted with our named partner organizations including ALA, ARL, and SPARC. All project deliverables will be openly-licensed and embedded in leading programs for graduate education and professional development, ensuring that they will be adaptable, and usable by other institutions and communities. In order to answer our research questions we hope to engage with more than 100 educators and administrators as well as more than 500 students and 10 experts.

These stakeholders will be drawn from all 50 states and the District of Columbia with particular attention paid to the needs of librarians and LIS programs of all types—large and small, urban and rural, national and regional leaders as well as more specialized programs and remote communities.

Our research is designed to produce generalizable results about the needs and competencies required for AI education, the needs of librarians across the major areas of librarianship, and the institutional barriers that reduce librarians' ability to proactively meet their mission in the face of administrative and technological change. This will be useful for researchers building on our work, as well as those focused on other areas of LIS education designed to support empowered practice in the face of change. It is also designed to directly advance professional practice through heightened awareness of specific gaps and challenges, a new community of practice for AI educators working in LIS, and a field-tested model for open and empowered education.

The model OER will be piloted in at least four leading LIS programs, impacting hundreds of students directly and laying the foundation for future curricula that change the face of the field. We will also partner with leading educational programs to develop a coordinated plan for education that provides a coherent foundation in graduate courses buttressed by a clearly-aligned set of professional development offerings.

We hope these resources will be valuable for all 65 ALA-accredited LIS programs who need to offer legal training as described in the ALA core competencies and are increasingly called to provide information on AI and related tools. We also plan to connect this work with established and emerging professional development programs in keeping with IMLS's stated commitment to "explore cutting edge tools and fresh topics in the content and provision of continuing education." Ultimately, we hope to empower the [estimated 145,000 librarians](#) serving as guides for these critical topics in every community. By doing so we believe this proposal can help achieve the vision laid out by IMLS and EO 14277, to "invest in our educators and equip them with the tools and knowledge to not only train students about AI, but also to utilize AI in their classrooms to improve educational outcomes."

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