

FLORIDA LIBRARIES

SPRING 2026

**NO BUS?
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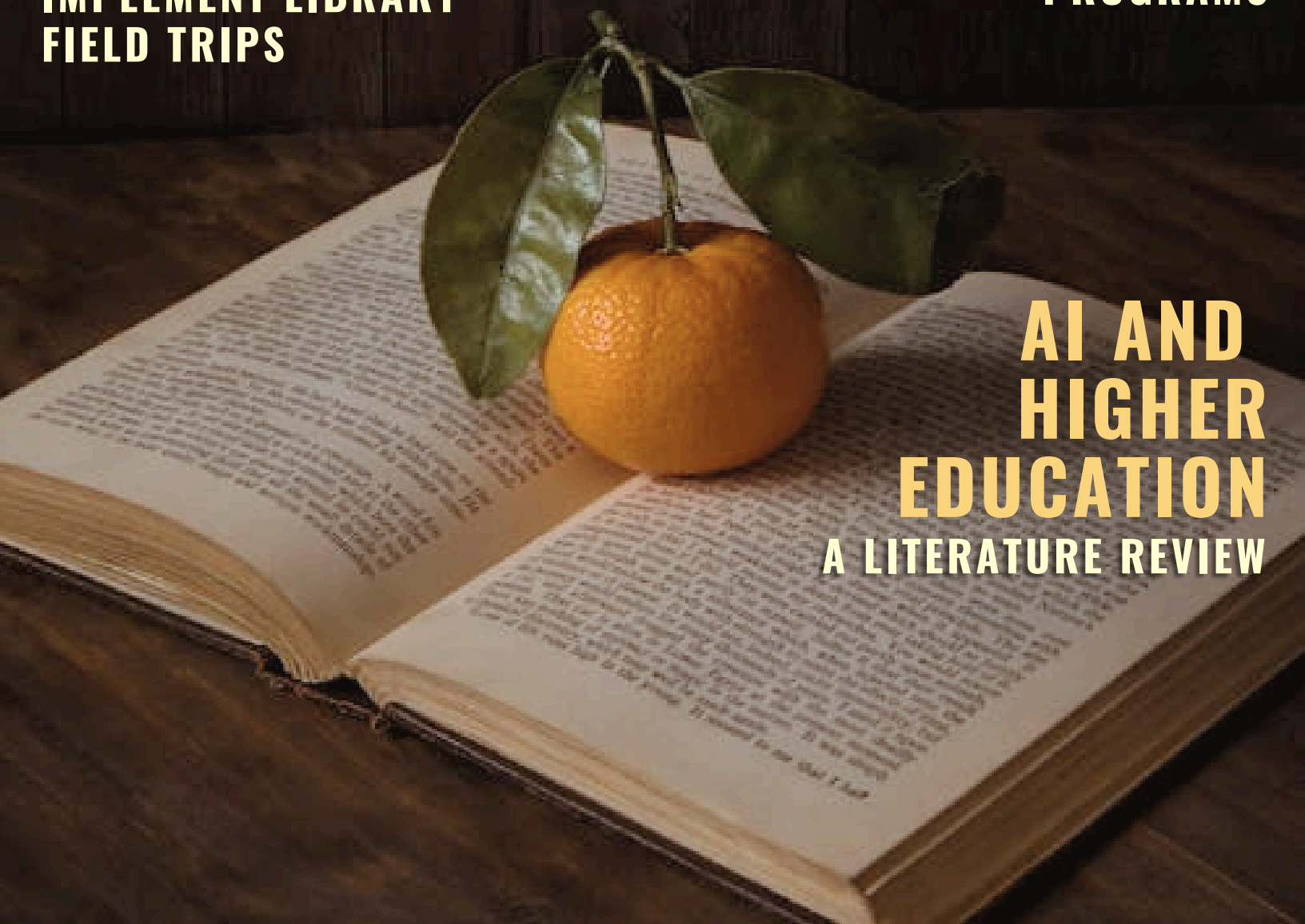
**A SIMPLE WAY TO
IMPLEMENT LIBRARY
FIELD TRIPS**

TIPS FOR TEENS

**INSIDE MIAMI-DADE'S
SUCCESSFUL TEEN
PROGRAMS**

**AI AND
HIGHER
EDUCATION**

A LITERATURE REVIEW





INTRODUCING: SHP COMICS



Advance Praise



Zicky deftly employs two different artists to reflect how the narrative slips between fantasy and reality... all while grounding the chaotic story in the growing pains of children and the anxieties of the adults raising them.

—Booklife/ Publishers Weekly

Zicky is funny, sweet and definitely nods to Calvin and Hobbes. I am adding it to our collection and have spread the word to my fellow comics librarians!

—Jackie Bush, Teen Services Librarian
Stratford Library Association



sharp and hilarious... The ending will leave readers hungry for the next installment.

—Booklife/Publishers Weekly
(Editor's Pick)

A free-spirited, blood-thirsty horror story set at history's greatest rock concert... Fans of Woodstock and vampires both will find much to enjoy in this chilling volume.

—Kirkus Reviews

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Perfect for fans of literary comedy with a rebellious streak.

Finding Jim is available now.



FROM FLORIDA AUTHOR
NANCY STONE

June
23rd
2026

Cordelia believes in facts. Frano believes in destiny. They're as different as storm clouds and sunshine—until they discover three baby white storks that glow with mysterious light.

No one else can see the glow, just Cordelia and Frano—and she wants nothing to do with the new boy. Yet with a massive hurricane barreling toward Florida, the birds' very survival depends on this unlikely pair.

ISBN: 9781958325537 (Hardback) 280p 5.5x8.5in \$19.99

Ages: 8-12; Grade: Gr 3-6 Pub. date: June 23rd 2026

Themes: climate change, **saving the planet;** magical realism; friendship; **Florida;** storks; storm; **science and nature;** activism;

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- A **magical realism** story about rescuing the legendary glow storks
- **Strong, appealing characters** capture the heart while the narrative voice crackles with energy.



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FROM THE EDITOR

MARY DANIELS



It's May, and you know what that means. ~~Endless Justin Timberlake memes.~~
FLA Annual Conference!

I'm always happy to go to conference—it's a nice break from the ordinary, for one thing, but there's so much more to it than that.

Conference is a great time for us to learn from each other. I usually come back to the library the following Monday with a stack of flyers and business cards, more swag than I know what to do with, pages of notes brimming with new ideas, fresh takes on old problems, and a renewed sense of "this is why I do what I do."

More than that, it's a time to connect. It's so important that we take the time to speak with and get to know our colleagues in the field. Especially at a time of such upheaval and uncertainty, it's more important than ever that we build our networks and create that safety net for each other. Something as simple as a mini-vent session or a genuine compliment on someone's most excellent bookish gear (there will be plenty!) can completely alter the course of the day—usually for good.

If you've never been and are dithering about going, I highly recommend it. If this is your first year attending, **get in touch**—in the summer we do our Conference Recap issue and I'd love to feature your thoughts!

I'll even throw in some tips ~~no one asked for~~ as someone who's been going to FLACon since 2014:

- You get out of conference what you put in. Don't be afraid to participate! Largely, this is a field of nerds and introverts. If you're shy, most likely you're not alone! Put yourself out there, make conversation with someone new, and embrace what conference has to offer.
- Visit the vendors! Not only is this a great chance to see what's out there in Library World, but getting to meet representatives from these companies is pleasant *and* beneficial. Be sure to do the Scavenger Hunt for a chance to win great prizes! And this goes without saying: SWAG (be sure to bring some back for your coworkers who did not attend conference)!
- Post your pics on social media! For that matter, take pictures!
- Be sure to visit Poster Sessions. Some of the coolest ideas are demonstrated in poster form.
- Check out the author tables!
- Attend sessions but make time for play, too. The President's Reception is always a good time, plus there are after/pre-hours events, Alumni receptions, and more!

If you see me, stop and say "hi!"

MARY DANIELS, MLIS
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

FROM THE PRESIDENT

ALLISON GRUBBS



Hello and welcome to the Spring edition of *Florida Libraries*. Since Spring has sprung, I've given in to the seasonal urge to clean, organize, and make space for what matters most. This year, I invite you to think about spring cleaning in a different way: not just as a task for your shelves and closets, but as an opportunity to reflect, reconnect, and share your story.

Libraries are no strangers to the idea of curation. We thoughtfully select, organize, and preserve materials so our communities can learn, explore, and grow. But beyond the collections we manage, each of us carries a story that shapes the work we do. Our experiences, challenges, inspirations, and even the unexpected moments in our careers all contribute to the vibrant tapestry of librarianship in Florida.

Spring cleaning can be a powerful metaphor for revisiting these stories. What have you been holding onto that no longer serves you? What successes have you not taken the time to celebrate? What lessons could benefit a colleague if only they were shared?

"Share Your Story," our 2025-2026 FLA theme, is more than a slogan; it's a call to action. When we share our stories, we strengthen our professional community. A program that didn't go as planned might offer invaluable insights to someone else. A creative outreach idea could spark innovation in another library. Even your personal journey into librarianship might inspire someone just beginning on their path.

Our libraries are built on stories—those found in books, archives, and digital collections—but also those lived and shared by the people who bring these institutions to life every day. This spring, as you tidy your spaces and refresh your outlook, I hope you'll also take the time to reflect on your journey and consider how your story might inspire others.

Let's make this a season not only of cleaning, but of connection. Your story matters. And when you share it, you help shape the future of libraries across Florida.

Best regards,

ALLISON GRUBBS

FLA PRESIDENT, 2025-26

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

JENNIFER K. ABDELNOUR, CAE



FLA kicked off 2026 with Library Legislative Day on January 22. More than 30 library supporters met with legislators and aides to tell their library stories and request support of FLA's funding priorities. Our advocates received positive feedback and good questions from their legislators. Thank you to all participants. A special thank you to our Library Day sponsor, OverDrive.

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In late March, FLA members elected five FLA members to the 2026-2027 FLA Board of Directors. Congratulations to Vice President/President-Elect Belle Reynoso; Treasurer, Dave Whisenant; Region 2 Director, Aurora Arthay; Region 5 Director, Holly Albanese (continuing); Region 6 Director Lori O'Gara, and ALA Councilor, Amy Jones. We appreciate your past and future service to FLA and are excited to be working with you.

FLA will be awarding three worthy graduate students with scholarships of \$1,000 each. In addition, we will honor esteemed libraries, library staff, and library supporters with 15 awards. Thank you to Florida State University and the University of South Florida for their support of two of our graduate scholarships. FLA's Past Presidents made a third scholarship possible this year, and we thank our esteemed former leaders for their continuing generosity and support of the library profession. Congratulations to all of our honorees.

FLA has issued its first Call for Committee Members for 2026-27. This is your chance to serve your association, fellow members, and the larger Florida library community. Not sure what FLA committees do? [Click here](#) or sit in on the committee meetings during our conference next month. There is no obligation to join, just the opportunity to learn which one piques your interest. FLA will send a second call immediately following the conference.

Speaking of conference, [registration is still open](#) for FLA's largest event: our Annual Conference in Orlando, May 12-15. Our keynote speaker will be library marketing expert Angela Hursh, with special presentations by ALA President Sam Helmick and Urban Libraries Council CEO Brooks Rainwater. Thank you to our many exhibitors and sponsors for their support of FLA and the conference.

This conference is chock full of learning, networking, and just plain fun. In fact, while I staff the conference, I still find FLA's yearly gathering to be the most fun of any I have worked (and I've staffed many)!

I look forward to seeing you at the FLA Conference later this month. Have a safe and enjoyable summer.

As always, thank you for supporting Florida libraries!

Jennifer K. Abdelnour
JENNY ABDELNOUR, CAE
FLA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MEET THE EDITORIAL BOARD

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Mary Daniels

Mary Daniels is the Materials and Marketing Manager at the Maitland Public Library, where she has worked since 2013. She graduated from USF with her MLIS, and has her Bachelors in English from UCF. She is passionate about writing, literacy, intellectual freedom, and the library field, and has worked on *Florida Libraries* since 2019. Her writing has also been featured in *Library Journal*.



FLA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Jenny Abdelnour

Jennifer K. Abdelnour, CAE, is FLA's Executive Director. Jenny's background includes more than 25 years working in leadership development, public policy, public relations, communications, conference management, and association management. Jenny earned an M.A. in political science with a concentration in applied politics from American University's School of Public Affairs and a B.S. in Criminology from Florida State University. In addition, she earned and maintains the Certified Association Executive (CAE) credential from the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE). Jenny is a member of the Florida Society of Association Executives and ASAE.



EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Kari Calicchio

Kari Calicchio is the Assistant Library Director at Dunedin Public Library and oversees reference, adult programs, and technical services. She has worked in Florida libraries since 2013 and is excited to further the sharing of ideas among library and information professionals throughout the state.



COPY EDITOR

Sarah Paige

Sarah Paige works with eResources and online learning as an assistant professor and librarian for Eastern Florida State College, where she has worked since 2018. She also is the discipline manager for the EFSC Librarians, advocating for them within the college. Sarah graduated with her MSLS from the University of North Texas in Denton, TX, and her Bachelor's in English from Lewis & Clark College in Portland, OR. She loves words and libraries and is happy to combine the two by collaborating with each issue's authors and her fellow editors. She loves cold weather when it arrives in Florida (she is still a Vermonter at heart).



COPY EDITOR

Sylvie Daubar-San Juan

Sylvie Daubar-San Juan holds an MLIS degree and an MA in Art History. She works as a Learning Resources Librarian at Miami Dade College - Wolfson Campus in downtown Miami. An article she wrote was published in the Fall/Winter 2022-2023 issue of *Florida Libraries*, and she serves on the Editorial Board. Sylvie is the current ALA NMRT Online Programs Chair and is also a member of the FLA Intellectual Freedom Committee.



COPY EDITOR

Sara Hack

Sara Hack is a Reference and Instruction Librarian at St. Petersburg College. She has a background in both public and academic libraries. She is currently a Doctoral Student at St. Thomas University studying Educational Leadership. She received her MLIS from USF and her B.A. in Anthropology and Sociology from FIU. She has been a copy editor for *Florida Libraries* since August 2022 and has enjoyed every minute of it. In her spare time, you will probably find her at a tea shop trying their new drinks.



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Everglades University

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North Miami Beach Public Library

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Osceola Library System - Hart Memorial Library

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Pinellas Public Library Cooperative

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VISTA

BEYOND THE LIBRARY: TRAVELING WITH OUR COMMUNITY

BY CHRISTINA BUTCHER

SENIOR LIBRARIAN - HEAD OF ADULT SERVICES

EAST LAKE COMMUNITY LIBRARY



ELCL Staff and Patrons at Imagine Museum

Ready to bring your patrons beyond the library? You don't need a bus to create community connections and experiences with your patrons. At East Lake Community Library (ELCL), we seek innovative ways to create community engagement through our programming. Our mission is to strengthen our community through inspiration, enrichment, and education. ELCL is a non-profit community library in Palm Harbor, Florida, located in a residential community. We are one of the few central activity centers for the surrounding area. We are also one of the smallest libraries in the county at 8,900 square feet, but consistently one of the busiest – in 2025 we served 60,626 patrons. We currently have plans to begin a library expansion project in the fall of 2026.

The adult field trip idea was created through a desire to promote library advocacy within the community, support our local organizations, create opportunities for community engagement, and to construct non-traditional programming experiences for our adult patrons. First, we looked at different non-profit organizations near our library. We also looked at different locations within the county. It was important for us to showcase different perspectives and topics within each selected location. We took our knowledge of what our patrons enjoy from our in-house programming and applied it to our research for field trip locations.

I printed out a small handmade sign of a school bus for inspiration (shoutout to Ms. Frizzle from *The Magic School Bus* TV show) and was ready to lead the way for our patrons.

The First Adult Field Trip

We hosted our first adult field trip at the ToyMakers of East Lake (ToyMakers) in Palm Harbor. The ToyMakers are a volunteer-run nonprofit organization that creates handmade wooden toys through a 36-step process. Next, they give the toys to children in need. The ToyMakers are five minutes from the library. We spoke to the ToyMakers and asked if we could bring our patrons for a tour. They graciously agreed. We marketed the program like our other programming, with the disclaimer that we would all meet at the ToyMakers location instead of the library. I held up my handmade bus sign when our patrons arrived and happily greeted our first adult field trip crew.

Our field trip attendees showcased camaraderie from their mutual love of the library. We were led on an amazing tour of the ToyMakers' facilities, and they promoted their need for volunteers. We also learned about all the work they do for the community. Our patrons were satisfied with the discovery of this community organization, made new friends, and received library updates. After this field trip, we knew we needed to create more memorable experiences like this one for our patrons.

BEYOND THE LIBRARY: TRAVELING WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

When asked for thoughts on the benefit of the trip, Flo Alonso, ToyMakers volunteer, responded:

“[The] ToyMakers of East Lake [were] pleased to welcome the East Lake Library field trip group....By visitors seeing this process in action, it allows for a better understanding and appreciation for our work....We don't have an advertising budget, so what an excellent opportunity to reach out to volunteers (and donations) from our community.”¹



Group photos of the field trip attendees at the ToyMakers of East Lake



Expanding Locations and New Partnerships

Since the ToyMakers trip, we have hosted several adult field trips to various organizations in the Pinellas County area, including East Lake Fire Rescue (ELFR) in Palm Harbor, Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center (Brooker Creek Preserve) in Tarpon Springs, Hammock Park in Dunedin, and the Imagine Museum in St. Petersburg. We chose to go beyond our surrounding area, and our patrons enjoyed the new locations. We advertised every field trip as free and open to the public, and patrons registered on our library calendar for each trip. We limited the number of people that could register for each trip depending on the location and how many were acceptable to bring on a tour.

At ELFR, our patrons got a tour of the fire station, explored the fire trucks up close, learned about the process of becoming a firefighter, saw the living quarters for the firefighters, and spoke with firefighters about their training and the outstanding work they do for the community. When asked about her thoughts on the benefits of the collaboration between the library and ELFR, Pamela DeMeo, Fire Marshal for ELFR, said, “[i]t was a pleasure welcoming the adult library group to East Lake Fire Rescue—seeing their excitement as they handled the tools of our trade reminded us that community connections are just as important as the calls we answer.”²



Above: East Lake Fire Rescue Firefighters and ELCL patrons
Below: ELCL field trip participants at Tree Identification class



BEYOND THE LIBRARY: TRAVELING WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

Brooker Creek Preserve provided patrons with a combination of nature and education, covering topics such as “tree identification” and “coyotes.” On each visit, the preserve’s auditorium was filled with curiosity and satisfaction. When asked about thoughts on the success of the trips, Julia Myers, Education and Outreach Specialist at Brooker Creek, stated:

The Brooker Creek Preserve Environmental Education Center is honored to be a recipient of the East Lake Community Library’s Adult Field Trip Program. These field trips introduce new audiences to the Preserve, many of whom may not have discovered us otherwise. By partnering with the Library, we’re able [to] cross-pollinate our efforts, strengthen our community ties, and foster a shared commitment to lifelong education and conservation.³

At Hammock Park in Dunedin, we brought our patrons to a bird-banding demonstration with Jim McGinity of Florida Avian Conservation, learned about various birds in the area, and received information on research techniques to use for bird identification. On a field trip to Imagine Museum, in St. Petersburg, a docent guided us through various art exhibits and the history of the museum. They also created a customized educational group activity for our group.



Bird-Banding Demonstration at Hammock Park

The Future of Adult Field Trips

ELCL is the center for learning and discovery in our area. The field trips have created new and future library supporters, new community partnerships, and new ideas on how to further meet our patrons’ needs. We want the community to partner with us for many years to come via our cultural and recreational opportunities. Therefore, in February of this year, we applied for and were issued a \$1,000 grant to fund future adult field trips. The grant offers us the means to create more unique experiences for our patrons this summer. In addition, it provides an opportunity to visit places that underserved populations might not have considered visiting before. We hope to inspire other libraries to try this idea with their patrons to create new connections within their communities for generations to come.

To learn more about our library and its upcoming expansion, visit eastlakelibrary.org.



Above: Lara Milligan teaching a Tree Identification class to ELCL field trip patrons

Below: Imagine Museum docent leading patrons on tour of exhibit



1. Flo Alonso, handwritten note to author, March 5, 2026.
2. Pamela DeMeo, email to author, February 20, 2026.
3. Julia Myers, email to author, February 20, 2026.

INTEGRITY IN ACTION

UPHOLDING DONOR INTENT AND ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

BY REBECCA CAMPBELL, MLIS

Rebecca Campbell holds a Bachelor of Arts in English from Salve Regina University and an MLIS from Simmons University. Prior to moving to Florida in 2018, she held various leadership roles at the Boston Public Library. She served on ALA's Public and Cultural Programs Advisory Committee. Rebecca joined the Tavares Public Library as Director in 2019. She is currently a juror for the Florida Book Awards, Florida Nonfiction category.



Partnerships with Friends Groups are often deeply rewarding, providing vital support for programs, collections, and community engagement. Yet these relationships can also be complex. Even with shared goals and good intentions, differences may arise over bylaws, donation management, or organizational roles. Long-standing historical tensions may further complicate the partnership. In some cases, despite sustained efforts to collaborate, a formal separation becomes the only viable solution.

Having successfully worked with Friends Groups and numerous community partners, I approached this partnership with the same commitment to collaboration and goodwill. However, after nearly four years of attempted collaboration and discussion, it became clear that a continued relationship was no longer feasible. The matter was brought before the City Administration, which voted unanimously to separate from the organization.

This experience underscored the essential role of clear governance and transparent processes within fundraising organizations. More importantly, it emphasized the responsibility of library leadership to maintain organizational integrity and to uphold public trust.

Once the separation was finalized, the focus shifted toward redefining support structures aligned with the library's mission. This period of transition led to new opportunities, such as the award of a collection development grant and a gardening grant.

These projects reinvigorated the library's work. Yet as the library moved forward, broader ethical concerns emerged: *Funds originally raised for one organization's stated purpose were subsequently offered to neighboring organizations.*

These actions raised fundamental questions:

*How do libraries honor donor intent?
What responsibility do individual libraries have to one another, to the public, and to the profession as a whole?*

The foundation of librarianship rests on service to the public good. Public libraries do not exist for competition, personal advancement, or organizational gain. They exist to preserve equitable access to knowledge, foster learning, and to steward public resources responsibly. Budgetary pressures or institutional ambition must never outweigh ethical decision-making. Upholding donor intent strengthens trust among donors, stakeholders, and the broader community. Honoring these principles safeguards the credibility of all public libraries. All library leaders share in this collective responsibility.¹

In a national climate characterized by book challenges, public scrutiny, and ongoing fiscal uncertainty, these commitments are more important than ever. Ethical consistency is not simply an ideal. It is an operational requirement for sustaining the trust upon which every public library depends.

INTEGRITY IN ACTION: UPHOLDING DONOR INTENT AND ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

When an Ethical Lapse Occurs: How Library Leaders Can Respond

Ethical lapses present significant challenges. When such situations arise, how should library leaders respond? The following steps, grounded in the [ALA Code of Ethics](#), will help protect your library, reinforce professional standards, and maintain public trust:

1. Communicate and Seek Guidance

Engage your city administrator or oversight authority. Maintain clear, factual, and professional communication. Ensure that all correspondence and documentation is well organized.

2. Model and Uphold Ethical Standards

Demonstrate integrity in every action. Your behavior sets the tone for your organization, reinforces an ethical culture, and strengthens both institutional credibility and public confidence in the profession.

3. Refocus on the Library's Mission

Anchor decisions and actions in the library's core mission. Prioritize programs, services, and partnerships that serve the community, reflect institutional values, and support long-term goals.

4. Acknowledge and Manage Personal Impact

Recognize that ethical challenges can be emotionally taxing. Reflecting on your responses allows for thoughtful, principled decision-making rather than reactive actions.

5. Document and Review

Keep detailed records of communications and decisions related to the situation. Periodic review ensures accountability and provides a reference for future policy or procedural improvements.

By integrating these practices, along with the ALA Code of Ethics, library directors can navigate complex situations while safeguarding the trust upon which librarianship depends.



“THE LIBRARY IS FOR THE MASSES”: THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE DEFUNIAK SPRINGS LIBRARY (1886-1926)

Donald A. Westbrook (PhD, MLIS)
San Jose State University

Abstract: This article surveys the early history of the Walton-DeFuniak Public Library in DeFuniak Springs, Florida, from its founding in 1887 by the Ladies Aide Society (renamed the Ladies Library Association the following year) to the death of its first professional librarian, Alice Fellows, in 1926. This timeframe sheds light on the library's origins and founding, early staff and operations, building and facilities, and some of its services and clientele. This article argues that the DeFuniak Library (now the Walton-DeFuniak Public Library) is best understood in the context of the political, social, and technological changes that took place in the late 19th century, namely the developments of railroads and adult education programs in the postbellum South. This milieu helps explain how and why individuals from the Northeastern United States, especially New York, made their way first as tourists and then permanent residents to DeFuniak Springs. Aided by advancements in railroad transportation, a thriving Chautauqua program developed in the area that encouraged women to organize a social organization that birthed one of the oldest libraries in the state of Florida.

Keywords: DeFuniak Springs, Florida, Ladies Library Association, Alice Fellows, Chautauqua, Libraries in the Southern United States

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The DeFuniak Library in DeFuniak Springs, Florida, now known as the Walton-DeFuniak Public Library, is a treasure for the history of librarianship in the state. While the St. Augustine Free Library (founded in 1874) is technically the oldest library in the state,¹ the library in DeFuniak Springs (founded in 1886, opened in 1887) has the distinction of being “the oldest library continuously operating in the state.”² Based on research of archival materials and secondary scholarship, this article presents a survey of the history of the DeFuniak Springs Library (now called the Walton-DeFuniak Library due to its location in Walton County) from 1886 to 1926. These dates have been chosen because they cover the institution's founding by the Ladies Library Association and extend through the formative years and especially the tenure of its first professional librarian, Alice Fellows, who was a singular and major force for the library for 30 years before she passed away in 1926.

This timeframe also offers insight into the political, social, and technological forces at play in the library's early development, especially the development of the railroad system in western Florida and the resulting influx of tourists and then permanent residents from the north to the postbellum South. In particular, the success of Florida Chautauqua Association programming, brought to DeFuniak Springs by leaders from New York,³ encouraged women to organize the Ladies Library Association. The Association proved indispensable in founding and funding the library in the late 1880s and led Fellows to lead and shape the institution and its programming from 1902 until 1926. In the course of research at the University of West Florida's West Florida History Center, it was discovered that Fellows—quite likely near the end of her life—wrote a short history of the library that proved to be incredibly useful in understanding its institutional history and her place within it. This piece is examined alongside more recent sources, both scholarly and journalistic, in order to better apprehend how and why this library formed and the ways in which it continues to serve the community of DeFuniak Springs long after the early players have passed from the scene. As this article seeks to demonstrate, the library became progressively more inclusive and open to the community as it moved from a social and subscription library to a resource available to all patrons in the area. As Fellows succinctly put it in her short history: “The library is for the masses.”⁴

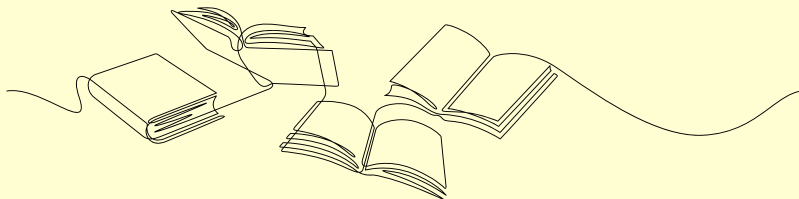
THE LIBRARY IS FOR THE MASSES

From North to South: Origins and Founding

The Walton-DeFuniak Library, originally known as the DeFuniak Library, was opened in 1887 in DeFuniak Springs, Florida.⁵ It was initially a social library run by women volunteers from the Ladies Library Association (originally known as the “Ladies Aide Society”), which was instrumental in its founding and early management.⁶ The archives of the Ladies Library Association of DeFuniak Springs are housed at the Walton-DeFuniak Library, with microfilm copies available at the archives of the University of West Florida in Pensacola.

Perhaps the single best scholarly source on the early history of the library comes from historian Ron Blazek’s article in *The Journal of Library History* (1987). Although nearly 40 years old, it is an indispensable guide to the library’s early years and, more importantly, the historical, technological, and cultural contexts in Florida that gave rise to the Florida Chautauqua and DeFuniak Library in the first place. As Blazek notes, the members of the Ladies Library Association of DeFuniak Springs were the “prime movers”⁷ who worked diligently to fund and staff the nascent library on a volunteer basis. Their motivation on the basis of charity turned out to be a sharp and ironic contrast to the explicitly commercial interests that led to the settlement of the town of DeFuniak Springs. The village was named after Frederick R. DeFuniak, a Confederate officer in the Civil War who became an executive of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad (L&N) that made its way into northwest Florida by the late 19th century.⁸

Indeed, it was the development of the railroad in the region after the Civil War that brought a variety of demographic shifts in the form of northern tourists (especially from New York) who spent their winters in DeFuniak Springs, and gradually gave way to permanent residential communities. (Even Melvil Dewey set up a winter Lake Placid Club (also referred to as Lake Placid Loj [Lodge]) in Lake Placid (formerly Lake Stearns), Florida that operated from 1926 until his death in 1931).⁹ Interest in starting a library among women volunteers originally from the north also came as a result of the educational programs that sprang up in the area soon after the arrival of the Florida Chautauqua Assembly, which began in 1885.¹⁰ Two years later, the Florida State Normal College was founded in DeFuniak Springs (and would operate for eighteen years until its closing in 1905), attesting to the town’s growing role as an educational center in the region.¹¹ The Florida chapter of Chautauqua, however, remained a dominant force and resembled its counterpart in New York with its emphasis on religion (i.e., Protestant Christianity) as well as adult programming that incorporated recreation and outdoor entertainment and took place “each year for six weeks from February to April.”¹² The Florida Chautauqua programs continued in DeFuniak Springs for over four decades and were designed to reshape the town as the “Athens of West Florida.”¹³ It was hoped that the programs and entertainment “would draw middling and upper class citizens into West Florida” and bring a new source of income to the area aside from the lumber industry that was “the financial backbone of the region.”¹⁴ At its height in 1909 and 1910, “a new 4,000 seat auditorium [was built] to replace the 2,500 facility to accommodate the 4,000 tourists a day now arriving by excursion train to hear the greatest lecturers of the times,” according to a historical timeline provided by the Florida Chautauqua Assembly.¹⁵ The winter activities attracted many prominent speakers, including an invitation to Governor William McKinley of Ohio (in 1895, two years before the start of his presidency, though his attendance is unclear)¹⁶ as well as “college presidents and congressmen” from across the United States.¹⁷



5. Blazek, 1987, p. 384; City of DeFuniak Springs, 2023

6. Blazek, 1987, p. 389

7. Blazek, 1987, p. 383

8. Merkel, 2008, pp. 13-32

9. Takeuchi, 1966, pp. 127-132

10. Florida Chautauqua Assembly, 2018; Scott, 1999, p. 395

11. Clifford, 1996

12. Hiller, 1991, p. 31

13. Blazek, 1987, p. 382; Levine, et al., 2009, p. 243

14. Esing, 2014, p. 113

15. Florida Chautauqua Assembly, 2018

16. Blazek, 1987, p. 382; DeFuniak Springs Visitor Center, 2026

17. Hiller, 1991, p. 31

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Over time, however, the Florida Chautauqua transitioned from its educational roots and began to offer popular entertainment (evening plays, for instance) in order to ensure large attendance and even larger income. Towns, for instance, has analyzed the history of Florida Chautauqua as one that combined “boosterism” (aggressive self-promotion and marketing), education, and entertainment “until it was replaced by the mass media” that emerged in the early 20th century.¹⁸ Tourists from the north were also attracted to the town’s fledgling health resort and the potential of its “spring water...said to equal in purity and restorative powers those at Poland and Waukesha [Wisconsin].”¹⁹ As the Florida Chautauqua became more commercialized and an important dimension of the region’s tourist industry, the Ladies Library Association appeared to have stepped into a more firmly educational role and “maintained its course as an adult education agency.”²⁰ Indeed, the Ladies Library Association had a more permanent vision of itself as a force for self-improvement and charity in the nascent community, one that outpaced the Florida Chautauqua and served as a reflection of larger trends of librarianship in the United States. Dee Garrison, for instance, has discussed the “feminization of librarianship” that took place in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,²¹ and Mary Niles Maack has written about the increased prominence of volunteer and professional women in librarianship during the era of Melvil Dewey as a form of proto-feminism that privileged “knowledge as power and power as empowerment.”²² Paula D. Watson, meanwhile, has researched the role of women’s voluntary library organizations in this burgeoning postbellum period, observing that “women’s clubs contributed in a very tangible way to the spread of the public library idea and to the foundation of numerous libraries in cities and towns across the country.”²³ This was certainly true of the Ladies Library Association of DeFuniak Springs as it expanded its influence on its own terms and under its own leadership.

In 1886, the Ladies Library Association negotiated a remarkable 99-year lease for a new building on a “vacant lot adjacent to the Chautauqua” with the promise, made to the Lake DeFuniak Land Company, that the property “shall be used as a public library only and under no circumstances as a domicile for the librarian.”²⁴ Initial building costs, according to its first librarian Alice Fellows, were \$579.80 for the original building and \$348.15 for an additional room that was added in 1893/1894.²⁵ By *public library*, the agreeing parties evidently meant a library facility whose services were available to the public in a general and generic way, since in reality the institution was a social and subscription library in its first decades. In 1924, the library became “public” in the sense that it finally began to receive funding from the city (though only \$10.00 per month) and this support was marginally expanded in the following decade to include payment of the water bill.²⁶ Blazek discovered that “it was not until the 1960s that the subscription fees were finally eliminated and the county and city assumed total responsibility for its maintenance”²⁷ in line with a movement toward increased county, state, and federal funding for American public libraries from the 1960s and 1970s to the present.²⁸



Library Building (Walton County website)

18. Towns, 1977, p. 228

19. Hiller, 1991, p. 31

20. Blazek, 1987, p. 388

21. Garrison, 1972

22. Maack, 1998, p. 59

23. Watson, 1994, p. 235

24. Blazek, 1987, p. 384

25. University of West Florida, ca. 1930; DeFuniak Springs Visitor Center, 2023

26. Blazek, 1987, p. 391

27. Blazek, 1987, p. 392

28. Wiegand, 2015, p. 193

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Alice Fellows (DeFuniak Springs Friends of the Library)

Staff and Operations: The Ladies Library Association and Alice Fellows

The library's first full-time and paid librarian was Alice Fellows, who was employed by the DeFuniak Library from 1902 until she passed away in 1926 at the age of 65.²⁹ She was 40 or 41 when she took over operations of the library. According to the City of DeFuniak Springs, Fellows had been a member of the Ladies Library Association since 1894³⁰ and Blazek discovered that she served as secretary of the association before taking on her full-time and salaried position as "the first professional librarian."³¹ This status as secretary of the association was corroborated by research of the association's meeting minutes, where she is listed as such as early as November 28, 1896.³²

The minutes from another meeting, held on November 30, 1918, indicate that "Miss Fellows was unanimously elected as librarian and a vote of thanks given her for her faithfulness,"³³ suggesting that the association, as a formality, voted on and re-affirmed her continued status and employment (apparently on an annual basis) without objection. Her professional compensation was meager and continued that way throughout her tenure in DeFuniak Springs. Fellows initially made "about \$6.50 for a three-month period" (in 1902) and eventually earned \$13.00 a month by 1926.³⁴ In a profile of the library for the Florida Library History Project conducted by the University of South Florida, it is reported that Fellows "declined more money, as she worked largely through her love of the task and dutifully serving the people."³⁵ In her history of the library, Fellows mentioned that the hours of operation varied but steadily expanded under her watch and maintenance. "In the early days [1887] the library was open four hours in the week" but by the 1920s she staffed it "a part of every day in the week."³⁶

Despite this salary and schedule, Fellows was so committed to her role that, according to Blazek, it "spurred her to return to her native state of New York for an education at Dewey's State Library Training School at Albany."³⁷ After studying at Dewey's Albany school, she returned to Florida and appears to have served as the primary and sole librarian until her death. As Fellows described her manifold duties in an undated statement that appears to be from the early 1920s: "The librarian of a small library must be the head of the circulation department, children's librarian, reference librarian, cataloger, book keeper, statistician, collector, press correspondent, and janitor."³⁸ In addition, she continued to attend the regular meetings of the Ladies Library Association, whose monthly minutes featured a handwritten "Librarian's Report" provided by Fellows, complete with statistics about membership dues, expenses, and "book rent."³⁹ Decades after Fellows' death, her influence can be felt in a number of ways—from cataloging to programming, as explored below—and there is even a rumor that her ghost continues to haunt (or perhaps benevolently look over?) the building where she devoted a significant portion of her professional life.⁴⁰

In connection with her role as the senior librarian—and the de facto chief fundraiser on behalf of the Ladies Library Association—Fellows wrote a short (5-page, type-written) history of the DeFuniak Library that offers insight into working conditions during the early years (especially from 1902 to 1926).⁴¹ This history was originally written for use by a local newspaper to appeal to the community for financial support, but no evidence for the published article could be found. While there is "no indication of any impact on the funding authorities,"⁴² the document is important as a piece of library history and, to a lesser extent, autobiography. It notes, for instance, that the holdings of the library in DeFuniak Springs came chiefly from the donations of members of the Ladies Library Association; this is not too surprising and is corroborated by Blazek, who found "little mention of planned purchases" and a "reliance on book donations for stocking the shelves on opening day" in 1887 that appears to have continued as standard operating procedure throughout Fellows' tenure.⁴³

29. Blazek, 1987, pp. 389, 392

30. City of DeFuniak Springs, 2023

31. Blazek, 1987, pp. 385, 389

32. University of West Florida, 1896

33. University of West Florida, 1918

34. Blazek, 1987, p. 389

35. Jasper and McCook, 1998, pp. 433-434

36. University of West Florida, ca. 1930

37. Blazek, 1987, p. 389

38. University of West Florida, ca. 1930

39. University of West Florida, ca. 1930

40. *Northwest Florida Daily News*, 2017

41. University of West Florida, ca. 1930

42. Blazek, 1987, p. 393

43. Blazek, 1987, pp. 385-86

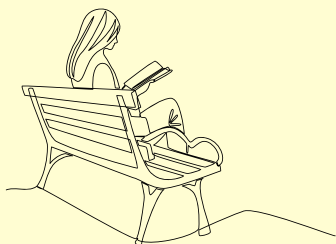
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Fellows, to her credit, made do with the limited resources and effectively used her connections and library training to ensure that materials were properly cataloged under her watch. As she wrote in the third person: “Since 1902 the writer has been the only librarian in charge, and at present is on duty a part of every day in the week. Soon after being put in charge, and under the instruction of Salome Cutler Fairchild, of the New York State Library School, she classified and catalogued the books, using the Dewey Decimal system.”⁴⁴ Over time, the collection grew and nearly doubled: “When the cataloging was begun we had 2000 books [....] now they number 3950.”⁴⁵

Fellows does not mention any library assistants in her brief history but this is perhaps because the library enjoyed the implicit assistance of volunteers drawn from the dedicated Ladies Library Association, which continued to meet on a monthly basis in the building.⁴⁶ With respect to working and financial conditions, Fellows observed in the 1920s that “[t]he library is handicapped [sic] by being of the subscription order. Its only maintenance at this writing is its membership and other fees. A merchant handles only goods that he can sell but the most expensive stock in a library brings no financial return.”⁴⁷ This is, once again, a testament to the precarious economic situation of this small library in the postbellum South. In addition, the operational predicament was quite likely exacerbated by the understandable but unfortunate set of circumstances that led the Ladies Library Association to decline Carnegie funding that might have otherwise afforded economic security, especially as the Florida Chautauqua began to wane in influence and income potential for the area.⁴⁸ Discussion of Fellows’ role in the Carnegie application process—which serves as yet another affirmation of her guiding hand and influence—is taken up in the following section.

Building and Facilities: Making History and Declining Carnegie Funding

The DeFuniak Library, now the Walton-DeFuniak Library, has remained in the same building since it was first opened as a social library in 1887.⁴⁹ The library continues to be housed in a small, quaint building and is one of only four libraries in Walton County. The other county libraries are the Coastal Branch Library in Santa Rosa Beach, Freeport Public Library in Freeport, and Gladys N. Milton Memorial Library in Flowersview.⁵⁰ Construction for the building began in 1886 and was completed in relatively short order in 1887; the main library space and adjoining reading room consisted of “a 16.5 by 24-foot room”⁵¹ that was enhanced by the addition of an adjacent room in 1893/1894.⁵² Further renovations took place nearly a century later in 1984; on the whole, though, the library has remained remarkably the same in terms of space and architecture since its opening and even retains the original pine wood flooring in the main room.⁵³ A profile for the Library History Project (University of South Florida) notes that the library continues to retain its “collection of swords and other weaponry that ranges from those used at the time of the Crusades to the rifles of the Daniel Boone era, as well as various significant historical scrapbooks, portraits, books, pictures, and antiques.”⁵⁴ This includes a battle ax from the 12th century that is now part of the Bruce Family Weapons Collection housed at the library after a previous host, Palmer College in northwest Florida, closed down in the mid-1930s and was unable to store the artifacts.⁵⁵ In 2018, a local news station in northwest Florida did a piece about the library that included an overview of its history and featured footage of the interior and exterior, including a view of the front door signage that still simply lists “LIBRARY” and another sign that reads “Established in 1886.”⁵⁶ According to a local news story corroborated by the Florida Library History Project, the library holds the distinction of being “the oldest continuously serving library in Florida, meaning in the same building intended as a library.”⁵⁷ This is confirmed by the City of DeFuniak Springs Visitor Center: “This is the oldest continuously operating library within its original structure in Florida—never closing since the day it officially opened on December 20, 1887 as a new addition to the Florida Chautauqua resort/campus.”⁵⁸



44. University of West Florida, ca. 1930
 45. University of West Florida, ca. 1930
 46. University of West Florida, 1887-1932
 47. University of West Florida, ca. 1930
 48. Blazek, 1987, pp. 382, 391
 49. Marasco, 2018
 50. Walton County Public Library, 2026
 51. Marasco, 2018

52. Blazek, 1987, p. 389; DeFuniak Springs Visitor Center, 2023
 53. Marasco, 2018; Jasper and McCook, 1998, p. 434
 54. Jasper and McCook, 1998, p. 434
 55. Cobb, 2018
 56. Marasco, 2018
 57. Marasco, 2018; Jasper and McCook, 1998, p. 434
 58. DeFuniak Springs Visitor Center, 2023

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The library at present (Walton County Tourism)

The main building and additional reading rooms were financed by the Ladies Library Association.⁵⁹ This association, as discussed earlier, was largely responsible for fundraising and sustaining operational costs during the library's early history. City and local funding supplemented the funding until the library became a publicly supported county entity in 1966.⁶⁰ Fellows writes in her short history that the namesake of the library and town, Frederick R. DeFuniak, "promised to give the library a generous support, and so it was named for him. This promise was not fulfilled."⁶¹ In the foundational years, the Ladies Library Association discussed a range of fundraising strategies but these seem to have been mostly unsuccessful and untested.

Some of the ideas were quite creative however, such as a proposal from the December 30, 1911 meeting minutes that the association "hold a Bazaar the coming fall." At a meeting on October 31, 1914, members considered (but apparently rejected) the idea to rent out space to "Church Societies" in order to bring in additional income at a rate of 50 cents per rental without food setup and one dollar per rental if food needed to be prepared and served. On November 27, 1915, the association's officers "decided to ask Mr. Murray [a local theater owner] to give one night at the Movies for the benefit of the Library, and Mrs. Stanley and Mrs. P. H. Miller were asked to secure talent to supplement his program," though it is unclear whether this plan ever went into action. Even when fundraising bore fruit, the yield tended to be small and was presumably disappointing to the committed members. In a rather humorous entry to the meeting minutes found for May 25, 1912, though, there is mention that "thirteen (13) dollars and laughter and jokes were the proceeds" from a particular fundraiser that delivered less than might have been hoped.⁶²

Under Fellows' leadership and with the backing of the Ladies Library Association, the library successfully applied for Carnegie grant funding on two occasions but twice turned it down. Given how indispensable Carnegie funding was in the development of thousands of public libraries across the United States, what circumstances would lead the DeFuniak Library, or any library for that matter, to decline such a grant? Wayne A. Wiegand's history of American public libraries acknowledged that "some communities rejected Carnegie grants" for a variety of reasons, including financial self-reliance as "a matter of pride," tense race relations and prejudice against including African Americans in Southern libraries (apparently not a cause for concern in DeFuniak Springs), and populist resentment from the working class toward Carnegie's philanthropic mission.⁶³ According to Blazek, the decision was based on a combination of "rising building costs," the desire of the Ladies Library Association to remain a social library (of "a quasi-public nature"), and the preference of association members to advocate for local funding from the city.⁶⁴ This implies, in other words, that the two Carnegie grant offers (\$10,000 in 1910 and again in 1916), in combination with bureaucratic and tax liabilities, were insufficient and unrealistic for the small library in a town with other and apparently more pressing financial needs. Indeed, according to Fellows' short history, "In 1910, W. W. Flournoy [on behalf of the library] secured for us the promise of \$10,000 Carnegie. The offer was made again six years later, but the city needed other improvements which were considered more essential."⁶⁵ These "other improvements" were left unspecified and, as mentioned earlier, the library would not receive support from the city until 1924—eight years after the second Carnegie grant offer—in the form of the rather paltry amount of \$10.00 per month in order to "maintain the facility."⁶⁶ As a result, the library continued to rely extensively on "outright gifts and donations"⁶⁷ from the Ladies Library Association and its three or four dozen supporters and volunteers for most of the first four decades of its existence. In reading through the minutes of the association, one predictably gets the sense that members regretted having to decline the Carnegie funding, such as this entry for the October 30, 1915 meeting: "The matter of Carnegie Library was also walked over. No action being necessary."⁶⁸

59. Blazek, 1987, pp. 388-389

60. Walton County, 2026

61. University of West Florida, ca. 1930

62. University of West Florida, 1912

63. Wiegand, 2015, p. 95

64. Blazek, 1987, p. 391

65. University of West Florida, ca. 1930; Blazek, 1987, p. 391

66. Blazek, 1987, p. 391

67. Blazek, 1987, p. 385

68. University of West Florida, 1915

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Library Services and Clientele: Education and Outreach on a Tight Budget

The first materials acquired by the DeFuniak Library, under the advisement of the Ladies Library Association, were magazines, reference materials, and educational books, all of which were considered useful in light of community needs and the library's early relations with the Florida Chautauqua.⁶⁹ Soon, the collection management workflow became more structured and systematized. By late 1887, soon after the official opening, the Ladies Library Association set up a "selection committee," as Blazek writes, made up of three women volunteers who operated "on a very limited budget" of only \$13.30 at the start of 1888.⁷⁰ In the minutes of the Ladies Library Association, such as the handwritten record for the meeting that took place on December 30, 1911, this group is referred to as the "Book Committee."⁷¹ The collection began to grow, however, thanks to community donations, to the point where Fellows recalled that the library had some 2,000 (albeit uncatalogued) books when she began her tenure in 1902.⁷² This is confirmed by the 1923 edition of the *American Library Directory*, which lists 2,097 volumes and names Fellows as the librarian in DeFuniak Springs.⁷³

By the time Fellows wrote her brief history sometime in the late 1920s—and quite possibly soon before her death in 1926—she reports that there were 3,950 items in the collection.⁷⁴ Apparently, a number of these items are still retained in the library today. According to a local television news story, the present-day library has "800 historically significant books, some dating back to the 1800s."⁷⁵ Fellows' record sheds further light on the types of early materials that were purchased or acquired through donations, including the following: "old time magazines" (such as *Ladies Repository* and *Atlantic Monthly*), a "Gazetteer of the U.S. of America," several dictionaries, *The Pleasures of Hope* (1804) by Thomas Campbell, and two Bibles dating to the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It appears that she was occasionally forced to answer questions about whether materials were immoral or indecent, at least based on an undated document entitled "CENSORING" that was also found in the archives of the Ladies Library Association. "Sometimes schools are censured because of ungodly teachers who are entrusted with the training of our children. Is the entire faculty condemned because of the few?" she asked rhetorically. Likewise, she continued, "Public libraries are censured because some one [sic] has heard that... 'There are books in the library that are not fit for young people to read,' forthwith the tale is spread by others equally uninformed."⁷⁶ Her caution against rumor and innuendo reflects a measured outlook in favor of inclusion and against censorship that has come to be a preeminent theme in contemporary American librarianship, as seen in the values of intellectual freedom found in the Library Bill of Rights.⁷⁷ Curiously, the library's profile for the Florida Library History Project notes, without any source or qualifications, that "she [Fellows] persisted in keeping all questionable books out of the library."⁷⁸ This may be a reference to blocking some particular books at the insistence of the public—though, again, no specifics are provided—but evidence from her own history suggests an anti-censorship view on the whole. According to Dan Owens, a past director of the Walton County Library System, Fellows' nephew reported that "she was very severe and strict...he said she did not tolerate frivolity and especially young boys that were being silly."⁷⁹ But even if Fellows was strict as a librarian and disciplinarian, this does not necessarily imply a conservative attitude in general or one that would manifest itself by censoring material simply in response to subjective patron displeasure.

In any event, her own history also records—in reflection of a patron-driven acquisition model that engenders further questions of inclusion and censorship at DeFuniak Library—that "the first books to be cataloged were the 'Pansy' stories, very much enjoyed thirty years back [i.e., in the late 1890s/early 1900s], but never disturbed in these days of the moving picture show and the automobile. Now the demand is for action and plenty of it."⁸⁰



69. University of West Florida, ca. 1930

70. Blazek, 1987, p. 386

71. University of West Florida, 1911

72. University of West Florida, ca. 1930

73. American Library Directory, 1923, p. 33

74. University of West Florida, ca. 1930

75. Marasco, 2018

76. University of West Florida, ca. 1930

77. American Library Association, 2026

78. Jasper and McCook, 1998, p. 434

79. Marasco, 2018

80. University of West Florida, ca. 1930

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Fellows' mention here of "these days of the moving picture show and the automobile" is also insightful because it indicates, yet again, the changing technological and transportation scene in the 1920s. While the interconnectivity made possible by the railroad system and the commercialism of the Florida Chautauqua was responsible for the relative population boom that led women to create a social library in the late 19th century, by the early 20th century railroads had been supplanted by early cars and entertainment tastes had shifted in the formative years of cinema. However, unlike the Florida Chautauqua, which closed down after about 40 years of operation,⁸¹ the library, though struggling as ever, persevered and continued to serve its patrons and the broader community to "spread its gospel" with little financial incentive.⁸²



The library in 1916 (State Library and Archives of Florida)

With this mission in mind, who was the clientele of the library and what services were offered? In the earliest years, as a social library, the library first served as a meeting place for members of the Ladies Library Association and those who seasonally came into town for the Florida Chautauqua. This symbiotic relationship appears to have influenced the primary clientele and service model of the nascent library. In the end, the initially congenial and mutually beneficial relationship between the Ladies Library Association and the Florida Chautauqua soured as the former solidified its library plans and the latter waned in popular and economic influence. As Blazek writes: "Unfortunately, subsequent records [i.e., after 1889] seem to indicate an inconsistent policy toward Chautauqua visitors from then on, lukewarm at best and apprehensive at worst."⁸³ It is also quite likely that relations between the male-dominated Florida Chautauqua and the female-driven Ladies Library Association were damaged by the former's degree of institutional autonomy within a patriarchal postbellum culture. As early as the 1886 incorporation of the Ladies Library Association, the foundation was set for a volunteer organization in which women were empowered as social actors in a way that was likely not afforded to them outside the organization. In Article 10 of the association's articles of incorporation (1886), for instance, we find this revealing clause about membership dues: "Any lady may become a member of this society by paying an initiation fee of 10 cents and signing the Constitution. Gentlemen may become honorary members by the payment of 25 cents."⁸⁴ Quite interestingly, the minutes for the association meeting on May 19, 1920 reveal that a motion was considered (but rejected) to change the name to the gender-neutral "DeFuniak Library Association," apparently in order to encourage more men to participate.⁸⁵ However, given the support of many male donors to the organization (both husbands and friends within the community), not to mention the leasing of land for the building approved by the male-led Lake DeFuniak Land Association, it seems reasonable that any tensions were specifically directed at the Florida Chautauqua and its administrators. On the other hand, meeting minutes of the association from January 31, 1920 could be invoked as evidence for a reconciliation between the two groups: "...partial plans were laid for holding a reception for Tourists at the Library sometime during the Chautauqua."⁸⁶ Despite good intentions, the Florida Chautauqua ceased operations by 1928,⁸⁷ two years after Fellows' death. The parting of ways was probably not particularly surprising, given the divergent community mission of the social library and the ultimately failed commercial-entertainment model of the Florida Chautauqua as it moved away from "religious viewpoints" and adult vocational programming (including "art, cookery, elocution, and music") in the early 20th century.⁸⁸



81. Blazek, 1987, p. 382

82. Blazek, 1987, p. 389

83. Blazek, 1987, p. 386

84. Blazek, 1987, p. 384

85. University of West Florida, ca. 1920

86. University of West Florida, 1920

87. Florida Chautauqua Assembly, 2018

88. Towns, 1977, p. 235

THE LIBRARY IS FOR THE MASSES

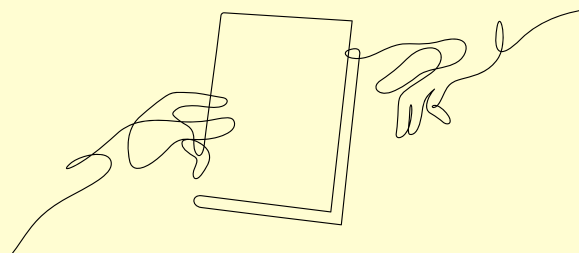
The library's primary clientele, especially as it moved into the early 20th century, consisted of middle and upper-middle class white patrons, especially women and children (i.e. students) who presumably learned about the building and its offerings due to the outreach efforts of the Ladies Library Association. Fellows notes in her history of the library: "Our circulation last year was 2 1/2 per capita of population, which compares favorably with other libraries. Sixty-three per cent [sic] of the readers were students."⁸⁹ According to Blazek and corroborated by a search in the archives of the University of West Florida, nothing indicates that the library excluded patrons, which is unusual for an emerging library situated in the postbellum South. As Blazek observed:

It is well to note here the absence of any references in the documents to racial composition of the library clientele either at the outset or in the succeeding years. Although it is unlikely that blacks were among the leaders in the movement, there is a definite possibility that they were never singled out for exclusion. Although the issue may well have been academic as it related to a white middle-class institution such as the library, the fact that the membership or service clientele was not enumerated in racial terms represents a unique departure from the small-town Florida library of the nineteenth century.⁹⁰

Moreover, this apparent movement toward inclusion is supported by rhetoric found in other archival documents from the Ladies Library Association, in particular Fellows' brief history. She writes, for instance, that "Everywhere libraries are recognized as integral parts of public instruction...It is open twelve months in the year and is for all ages. If all our schools but the elementary were abolished a classical education could still be obtained from a good library, but on the other hand if the library should be taken away there are few who would ever get beyond the eight[h] grade. The library is for the masses."⁹¹ In evidence of the library practicing what it preached, Fellows provided books to local schools that were in need of materials in the 1920s, even if budgetary restrictions limited the intended dissemination. "For the last eight or ten years," Fellows reflected of the 1910s and early 1920s, "it has been our pleasure to supply the schools with supplementary reading. It is much to be regretted that we cannot give as complete a service as they need, because our funds are inadequate."⁹² Additionally, Fellows made connections between a proper education made possible by the library's resources, improved morality, and decreased criminality in society. "Give the boys and girls plenty of good books," she implored, "and it will not be long before there will be fewer criminals. Surely it would be more economical and sensible to put the public funds into books than penal institutions."⁹³ The Ladies Library Association at large was likewise committed to this goal. The minutes for the meeting on November 29, 1913 mention a donation of 12 dollars intended exclusively for the "Book Fund for Educational Books."⁹⁴

Conclusion

In 1966, the DeFuniak Library became the Walton County Public Library due to the funding it received as an institution within Walton County in northwest Florida and in 1975 was renamed the Walton-DeFuniak Public Library.⁹⁵ This brought to fruition a county-wide goal that Fellows had reported four decades earlier in her brief history: "With the commission and a County library law, DeFuniak library may become the center from which branches will be administered throughout the county—that is, if the regestered [sic] voters will put it across."⁹⁶ Walton County continues to be one of Florida's smaller counties in terms of population, with about 93,000 residents as of 2025.⁹⁷ In this region of the Florida Panhandle, DeFuniak Springs has grown since the decades after Alice Fellows' tenure ended in 1926. However, it remains relatively small, with a population of about 7,000.⁹⁸



89. University of West Florida, ca. 1930

90. Blazek, 1987, p. 386

91. University of West Florida, ca. 1930

92. University of West Florida, ca. 1930

93. University of West Florida, ca. 1930

94. University of West Florida, 1913

95. Walton County, 2026

96. University of West Florida, ca. 1930

97. United States Census Bureau, 2025

98. United States Census Bureau, 2024

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The public library is in the same place, in the same small building, and continues to offer its community services in the digital age, with, according to a 2018 journalistic piece, “around 39,000 different items—including books, DVDs and magazines...Card holders also gain access to computers, a 3D printer, projectors, digital books and other groups like computer programming and chess classes.”⁹⁹ The library, unusually, also houses the Bruce Family Weapons Collection of antique and rare weapons and armor as well as a digital gallery.¹⁰⁰ There is no fee to use the public library for residents of Walton County, and there is a \$35.00 fee for non-county users.¹⁰¹ Given its history as one of the oldest libraries in Florida, the building has become a museum as much as a functioning library, a fact that has been repeated in recent journalistic coverage.¹⁰² Indeed, today the library is located within the DeFuniak Springs Historic District, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.¹⁰³ The DeFuniak Springs Friends of the Library is active and continues the volunteer spirit that helped found the library in the first place.¹⁰⁴

Beyond these basic historical considerations, however, the institutional history of the Walton-DeFuniak Public Library is significant because it offers insight into some of the social, political, economic, and technological changes that were taking place in postbellum America more broadly and in Florida in particular. Several such themes have been taken up in the course of this piece, such as the relationship between railroad transportation lines and the development of the small village of DeFuniak Springs in northwest Florida. Another important relationship was the one that emerged between the arrival of northerners (especially from New York), the male-dominated Florida Chautauqua, and the women volunteers who found roles within the Ladies Library Association. This “north to south” influence on the library’s development only continued when its first librarian, Alice Fellows, returned to her native New York to attend Dewey’s library program in Albany before returning for duty in Florida. Further evidence of progressive attitudes in the profession of librarianship emerged when considering the library’s apparent absence of restrictions with respect to African American patrons in the Jim Crow era well before the beginning of the modern Civil Rights Movement. In addition, the library under Fellows’ leadership made efforts to provide educational materials to local schools in evidence of an inclusive and forward-looking outlook on the place of the library in the broader community that it strives to reach and serve.

The original social and subscription library in DeFuniak Springs, then, represents an unsuspecting but rewarding case study of the broader forces and counter-currents that were at play in postbellum Florida as it sought to attract newcomers and build a self-sustaining community. Despite the success of attracting the railroad and then the Florida Chautauqua, the small town’s luck turned out to be short-lived, as newcomers discovered other venues and opportunities for development in south Florida, including the more tropical Tampa Bay area and Miami. As Blazek observed, by the late 1920s, “the panhandle region had been forgotten by both tourists and prospective residents.”¹⁰⁵ If it were not for more stable financial support, first from the city (in 1924) and later from the county (in 1966), it is quite possible that the library would have been unable to sustain itself, especially without the benefit of Carnegie funding that it decided (or was forced) to decline on two occasions. However, in some ways the library was ahead of its time and aware of its place in Florida’s library community, for instance by becoming an institutional member of the Florida Library Association in 1925, just five years after that group was formally established with an organizational meeting in Orlando,¹⁰⁶ and remains a member today.¹⁰⁷ It is therefore a testament to the dedication of the early volunteers of the Ladies Library Association and to Alice Fellows in particular that this remarkable and historically valuable library has persevered and ultimately thrived. Although the DeFuniak Library did not fully partake in the benefits of the “Carnegie Era,”¹⁰⁸ the success of the female-led social library represents a microcosm of the brand of local volunteerism that took place elsewhere and transformed American libraries into the open and widespread institutions they are today.

99. Cobb, 2018

100. Bruce Family Weapons Collection, 2025

101. Cobb, 2018; Walton County, 2026

102. Cobb, 2018; Marasco, 2018

103. City of DeFuniak Springs, 2026

104. DeFuniak Springs Friends of the Library, 2026

105. Blazek, 1987, p. 388

106. Florida Library Association, 2026

107. *Florida Libraries*, Fall 2025, p. 39

108. Wiegand, 2015, p. 75

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Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful to Professor Emerita Debra L. Hansen at San Jose State University's School of Information for her mentorship and guidance as I began researching and teaching in the field of library history. Thanks are also due to Tim Bulger at the University of West Florida (University Archives and West Florida History Center) for very generously coordinating scans of materials from the Ladies Library Association of DeFuniak Springs Collection (M1980-04). Finally, thank you very much to peer reviewers and copy editors from *Florida Libraries* who immensely improved the text and its readability on a number of levels.

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SMALL AWARD, BIG RIPPLE

HOW A LIBRARY INNOVATION AWARD TRANSFORMED RESEARCH AND TEACHING AT UNF

BY BERYL WHITE-BING, VIRTUAL LEARNING LIBRARIAN
THOMAS G. CARPENTER LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA



WHY SMALL AWARDS MATTER

Innovation in libraries does not always begin with large national grants or major institutional investments. Often, meaningful experimentation begins with small regional funding opportunities that allow librarians to test new ideas and technologies. For academic libraries, these modest awards can serve as catalysts for interdisciplinary collaboration, new teaching tools, and innovative research partnerships.

Regional library organizations such as the Northeast Florida Library Information Network (NEFLIN) provide Awards designed to encourage experimentation and creative problem solving within libraries.¹ Although they are intentionally modest in scale, their impact can be substantial when the technologies they fund become shared resources across a campus community. A recent study also highlights the growing role of academic librarians as active partners in research and knowledge creation rather than solely as service providers.²

Two projects supported by NEFLIN Innovation Project Awards illustrate this multiplier effect. In 2018, one award supported the creation of a mobile virtual reality lab at St. Johns River State College. Several years later, a second NEFLIN award enabled the development of a cultural heritage, virtual reality (VR) experience at the University of North Florida (UNF). What began as individual projects ultimately expanded into campus-wide collaborations involving faculty research, immersive environmental learning, digital scholarship, and institutional outreach.

LAUNCHING VIRTUAL REALITY OUTREACH AT ST. JOHNS RIVER STATE COLLEGE

In 2018, the St. Johns River State College Library used a NEFLIN Innovation Project Award of \$8,383.86 to develop the Virtual Entertainment Technology (VET) Center, a mobile virtual reality lab designed to support the college's population of student veterans.³

The VET Center created opportunities for students to explore immersive technologies and connect with peers through shared experiences.



Students exploring virtual reality technology in the Virtual Entertainment Technology Center at St. Johns River State College.

Although initially intended as an outreach initiative, the mobile VR lab quickly attracted interest from faculty and students across multiple disciplines and became an academic resource used in classroom activities and demonstrations.

1. NEFLIN
2. Rabasa, Talatu, and A. Abrizah, 2024
3. NEFLIN, 2018

SMALL AWARD, BIG RIPPLE

THE EARTHA M.M. WHITE VIRTUAL REALITY EXPERIENCE

In 2023, the UNF Virtual Learning Center (VLC) received a NEFLIN Innovative Project Award of \$7,206.99 to develop the Eartha M.M. White Virtual Reality Experience.⁴ The project focused on the Eartha M.M. White Collection in UNF Special Collections and University Archives, and sought to create an immersive environment that allows visitors to explore the Eartha White Museum and learn about her legacy as a Jacksonville civil rights leader and philanthropist.

To support this work, the award funded the purchase of a Matterport Pro 3D camera capable of capturing high-resolution spatial scans. While the technology was initially acquired for the cultural heritage project, it soon became a shared resource that enabled additional interdisciplinary initiatives across the UNF campus.



The Eartha M.M. White Virtual Reality Experience created using spatial scanning technology and archival materials from the UNF Special Collections.

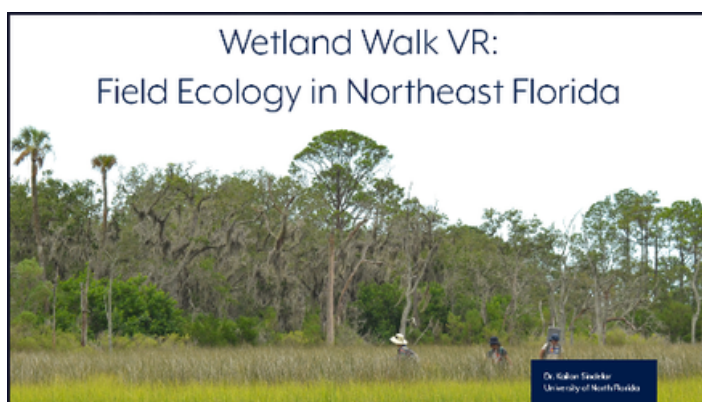
WETLANDS WALK VR EXPERIENCE

One of the most compelling examples of the projects' expanded impact is the Wetlands Walk VR Experience developed by UNF faculty member Dr. Kailan Sindelar. Using the spatial imaging capabilities of the Matterport camera, Sindelar captured LiDAR scans of three North Florida wetland environments and transformed them into an immersive virtual reality field experience.⁵

The project allows students and researchers to explore sensitive ecological environments virtually, offering a new way to study wetland ecosystems without disturbing fragile habitats.

VIRTUAL TOURS FOR RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP

The Matterport camera has also supported interactive virtual tours developed through UNF Research Technology Services. These tours document research environments such as the WEBB Coastal Research Station, COAS Psychology Laboratories, and other campus research facilities.⁶



Above: Wetlands Walk VR experience allowing users to explore northeast Florida wetland ecosystems in virtual reality



Example of a UNF research virtual tour created using spatial imaging technology

4. NEFLIN, 2023
5. SideQuest VR
6. UNF

SMALL AWARD, BIG RIPPLE

KINGSLEY PLANTATION SHORELINE RESTORATION PROJECT

Another example of interdisciplinary collaboration enabled by the camera is the Kingsley Plantation Shoreline Restoration Project located within the Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve. Researchers used spatial scanning technology to create a detailed digital model of the restoration site, enabling interactive exploration and long-term environmental documentation.⁷



Interactive virtual tour of the Kingsley Plantation shoreline restoration site.

IMPLEMENTATION, TRAINING AND IMPACT

The success of these projects was supported by intentional implementation and staff training within the Virtual Learning Center (VLC). The Virtual Learning Librarian and student assistants in the VLC developed hands-on familiarity with the Matterport Pro 3D camera and related VR technologies through internal experimentation and project-based learning rather than formal vendor training. This approach allowed staff to build confidence in using the equipment while supporting active projects such as the Eartha M. M. White VR Experience.

These technologies were integrated into classroom instruction in the VLC through collaborations with faculty across disciplines. For example, the Wetlands Walk VR experience was used to support environmental and field-based learning, allowing students to explore wetland ecosystems in a virtual setting. That experience was installed on all the VR headsets in the VLC and made available for instruction.

Similarly, VR experiences within the VLC have been incorporated into courses in public health, nutrition, and other subject areas to support experiential learning.

Student engagement with immersive technologies has been significant. Since the expansion of VR initiatives within the VLC, hundreds of students have participated in class sessions, individual bookings, and structured learning activities using VR and spatial technologies. These experiences provide students with opportunities to engage with environments and concepts that may otherwise be inaccessible due to location, cost, or physical constraints.

In addition to supporting instruction, these technologies have enhanced UNF's ability to share research and campus spaces with broader audiences. Virtual tours created through Research Technology Services allow prospective students, researchers, and community members to explore UNF facilities and field sites remotely, expanding the reach and visibility of university initiatives.

SMALL AWARD, BIG RIPPLE

CONCLUSION

Innovation in libraries does not always require large funding initiatives. Small regional innovation funding opportunities allow libraries to experiment with new technologies and build collaborative partnerships beyond the original scope of a project.

From the Eartha M.M. White cultural heritage experience to the Wetlands Walk environmental VR project and the Kingsley Plantation shoreline restoration tour, the Matterport camera obtained through a modest innovation award ultimately became shared research infrastructure supporting teaching, scholarship, and community engagement across the University of North Florida.

The success of these initiatives demonstrates how regional library organizations such as NEFLIN play a critical role in supporting experimentation and innovation within academic libraries.



Anthropology students use virtual reality to challenge stereotypes and enhance learning (UNF Virtual Learning Center [website](#))

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ENGAGING TEENS AT THE LIBRARY

Ideas, Solutions, and Tips

by Jennifer Shipley, Paulina Oporto Cespedes, and Daniel Jones



Teens bring creativity, energy, diverse interests, and a desire for connection to library communities, yet attracting and sustaining teen engagement can be challenging. Teen services are often deprioritized in favor of children's and adult programs, and initiatives aimed at teens may be discontinued if they do not quickly produce high attendance.

At the Miami-Dade Public Library System (MDPLS), we have achieved notable success in engaging teen patrons. This article highlights the key factors behind that success, drawing on the experiences of an administrator overseeing Young Adult (YA) services and two branch-level YA librarians. MDPLS has prioritized YA services after recognizing their ability to positively impact teens' lives, create meaningful staff experiences, and foster lifelong library advocates.

Our success is rooted in sustained investments in staff time, space, and funding to support high-quality teen programs, even when results are not immediate. By prioritizing relationship-building over short-term metrics, we allow programs to grow organically in collaboration with teens. This relationship-centered approach has led to increased teen engagement, higher YA circulation, stronger community partnerships, and multiple award-winning initiatives.

Rethinking Community Service Opportunities

Teen volunteerism does not have to be limited to traditional tasks like shelving or helping with crafts. One effective approach is creating a Teen Advisory Board (TAB), which gives teens a platform to share their opinions and provide feedback on programs, services, and collections. TAB members can create fun displays, suggest materials for purchase, assist with programs, author book reviews, promote library events at school, and act as ambassadors for the branch.

TABs are an essential part of young adult programming because they help build relationships and foster trust between teens and library staff. Having a trusted adult who listens without judgment gives teens a safe space to share ideas, express themselves, and feel like their voices truly matter.

TABs also make it easier to connect teens with programs that might otherwise be a tough sell, like college prep sessions or budgeting workshops. When teens help plan and promote these events, they are more likely to bring their friends and get others excited to join in. By having a captive audience, library staff can broach topics and interests that teens would not have otherwise explored on their own, providing a safe environment for discovering new interests.

Making Systemwide Services Teen-Friendly

When designing systemwide services, be sure to keep teens in mind. MDPLS has launched or re-evaluated services that incorporate teen interests and needs. MDPLS Libraries @ Your Door, Mobile Device Lending, Wi-Fi, Mobile Printing, and Homework Help and Tutoring programs have proven effective in attracting teen usage.

MDPLS Libraries @ Your Door launched in 2021 as a home delivery service to Miami-Dade residents. Teens with a library card gained the ability to order library materials through our catalog and have them delivered to their home at no cost. This made it easier for teens to access school, mental health, or leisure reading resources. While over 100,000 physical YA materials are circulated annually, over 7,000 are delivered by mail to over 800 teenagers annually.

The MDPLS Mobile Device Lending program also launched in 2021, allowing adults and teens with parental permission to check out mobile Wi-Fi hotspots and laptops with internet access for home use, a vital tool for bridging the digital divide. More than 1,500 mobile devices are loaned to teens each year.

ENGAGING TEENS AT THE LIBRARY

Free Wi-Fi and Mobile Printing are available at 47 MDPLS branches, with each user able to print up to 25 free color or black-and-white pages. Free Wi-Fi is accessed an average of 60,000 times per month. Additionally, 25 branches offer drive-up Wi-Fi in parking lots, with 16 locations providing 24/7 access to support last-minute school assignments. Drive-up Wi-Fi is used approximately 5,000 times per month. Mobile printing requires an email address but not a library card and print jobs can be picked up at any branch. Each year, MDPLS provides customers with over one million color copies and more than two million black-and-white copies.

The MDPLS Homework Help and Tutoring Program began in 2017 with one-hour sessions serving students in grades K-12 at select branches. In 2020, the program shifted to online tutoring, and by 2022, it adopted a hybrid model. Tutoring in reading, math, and science is now offered in person at 28 branches every Saturday and online on Wednesday and Thursday evenings. Students in grades 6–12 can receive free tutoring in Pre-Algebra, Algebra I & II, Geometry, Trigonometry, Pre-Calculus, Calculus, as well as SAT/ACT math and reading. The program delivers over 50,000 sessions annually, with online tutoring for teens averaging 8,000 sessions per year.

The MDPLS Summer Reading Challenge offers teens book-related activities, creative contests, and community service opportunities that count toward volunteer hours. Weekly giveaways and clubs — like chess, anime, Dungeons & Dragons, book clubs, and TABs — encourage teens to stay engaged and earn incentives. In 2025, more than 7,000 children and teens participated in the challenge, which fosters relationships, promotes summer reading, and helps prevent the “summer slide,” learning loss over the school break.

YOUmedia Miami teaches teens to use technology to tell stories and engage with the world in meaningful ways. Officially launched in February 2012 through a partnership with the Knight Foundation, the program now provides guidance and training on 21st-century skills to over 3,000 teens annually across four library locations. The most popular areas of use include 3D modeling and printing, audio production, graphic design, photography, and video production.

YOUmake Miami launched in 2015 at the Miami Beach Regional Library following the success of YOUmedia, with a greater emphasis on crafts, coworking, and serving all ages. Today, YOUmake provides 50 unique programs annually, including activities such as painting, screen-printing, sound effects, audio production, 3D Design, and sewing. The program has conducted over 1,400 workshops, averaging 28 workshops per week across two locations. Teens make up nearly 20 percent of YOUmake visitors, accounting for 2,400 of the annual participants. Music production, photography, and 3D design are the top three activities for teens.

Staff Development and Leadership

Each of our 50 branches has dedicated Young Adult staff who stay connected through regular systemwide meetings and committees focused on teen services. These gatherings foster collaboration, spark inspiration, and cultivate leadership, empowering staff to be both creative and supported in their work with teens.

These meetings also serve as spaces for professional development, often featuring guest speakers from youth-serving and social-service organizations, discussions on YA literature, and the exchange of programming ideas. These meetings, along with the work of related subcommittees, are central to how MDPLS encourages staff to take initiative, identify teen patrons’ needs, and pilot and implement innovative approaches.

YA staff are trained to navigate sensitive topics brought up by teens and are empowered to ensure their safety by connecting with MDPLS’s social work team when needed. This is further supported through partnerships with library consortiums and social service agencies, which offer specialized training in YA meetings. In the past year, select YA staff attended A Place to Belong: Neurodiversity and Mental Health in the Library, Youth Mental Health First Aid offered by a local non-profit, and a countywide Youth Mental Health Summit.



ENGAGING TEENS AT THE LIBRARY

Community Partnerships

Libraries are best able to engage and serve teens when they team up with other youth-serving institutions and organizations. MDPLS has brought in school bands for performances, college writing tutors to assist with application essays, health science students to demonstrate blood pressure screenings, technology students to introduce virtual reality, museum-based teaching artists to lead cultural heritage programs, and more. Some of these partnerships have grown into systemwide initiatives, like a recently launched collaboration with Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) to provide additional support for high school students navigating the college admissions and financial aid process.

These efforts leverage the trust that young people have in their library staff, creating new opportunities for teens to serve their community, take on leadership roles, access resources, and be exposed to new interests and potential passions. A key to our approach is that these relationships are open-ended, not transactional or limited to a single program or event.

This focus on partnerships aligns with Miami-Dade County's "No Wrong Door" initiative. By cultivating relationships with a wide range of groups and sharing community contacts and resources across branches, staff ensure that teens can access support through multiple pathways. Ongoing partnerships also enable staff to make effective referrals and provide consistent assistance.

Building Teen Programming

Listening to teens and incorporating their interests drives the success of MDPLS YA services. Staff bring teen feedback to the YA Committee to shape programs that attract more participants. Systemwide initiatives rely on support from the Library's Marketing Team and the Community Engagement and Programming Team (CEP), and the Information Technology Department (ITD) for resources like equipment, supplies, and promotion. Assessing space, coordination, staffing, and interest is essential for effective programming. The following are some examples of highly successful teen programs at MDPLS:

Gaming Tournaments: MDPLS has a strong tradition of hosting gaming tournaments, often tied to larger events like Fandom Fest or cosplay gatherings. In 2023 and 2024, tournaments ran over five weeks at six branches and concluded with a finale at the Main Library that drew more than 100 attendees. In 2025, staff developed a tournament toolkit to streamline future planning. Gaming events create a fun, family-friendly environment that encourages healthy competition and social interaction, particularly for teens who typically game at home alone. They also offer a valuable opportunity to engage families who may not otherwise visit the library and introduce them to available services.

The Write Up Teen Review Program: Since 2024, this initiative encourages teens to earn community service hours by submitting book reviews to the library catalog. After refining the software and internal processes, the program received 643 submissions, with 375 reviews published and 1,500 service hours awarded to 113 teens. A staff committee reviews submissions for quality and originality, guiding teens in writing and editing meaningful reviews that help fellow readers.

College and Volunteer Fairs: Launched in the fall of 2024, these events were driven by a staff-initiated committee focused on supporting teens with college admissions, financial aid, and career pathways. In the fall of 2025, two college success fairs and a volunteer fair drew in more than 300 participants and over a dozen partner organizations. The volunteer fairs connect high school students with community organizations and government departments offering volunteer opportunities, while the college success fairs provide on-site assistance with applications, financial aid, and scholarships, as well as more general guidance for navigating the college process.



ENGAGING TEENS AT THE LIBRARY



Intergenerational Art Programs

Art programs are thriving across MDPLS, and the intergenerational offerings add depth and interconnection between age groups.

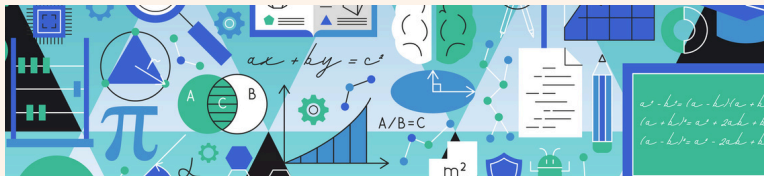
Art by Mail allows MDPLS TAB members to earn community service hours by creating small artworks for homebound seniors. These pieces, accompanied by handwritten notes expressing care, are included with the seniors' monthly Books by Mail deliveries.

Art and Conversation, a National Association of Counties (NACo) Achievement Award-winning collaboration with the MDPLS Art Services Department and TAB groups at six branches, brings teens and seniors together through simple art activities and guided conversation prompts that encourage intergenerational dialogue and connection.

DIY Depot and 13 Days of Halloween Movies and Creepy Crafts are examples of NACo Achievement Award-winning, bilingual programs designed to foster creativity and conversation among teens and tweens without the pressure of grades or competition. Both programs empower youth by involving them in activity planning and craft selection. DIY Depot offers hands-on projects and relaxed discussion year-round, while 13 Days of Halloween features PG-13 movies, themed crafts, and table talks addressing student concerns, respect, and cultural traditions.

Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM)

MDPLS has also developed a range of STEAM programs that attract teens while helping staff build meaningful relationships with them and with their schools. One example is the annual STEAMfest hosted at the Naranja Branch Library. The program received a NACo Achievement Award in 2025 and has attracted more than 300 participants in each of the past three years.



STEAMfest engages dozens of student volunteers who lead tables featuring hands-on science activities for younger participants. These students have the opportunity to serve as experts and educators within the community, and the event often leads to teens becoming library regulars and to longer-term collaborations with their teachers.

TeenTober

The Young Adult Library Services Association's (YALSA) TeenTober in October is a key opportunity to highlight teen services through creative programming. MDPLS supports TeenTober with supplies, a custom teen-focused homepage banner, and encouragement for Teen Advisory Board members and other teens to lead a wide array of event ideas like college fairs, art classes, gaming, and STEAM activities. TeenTober also encourages staff to experiment with innovative programs, with planning beginning at the spring YA meetings and continuing through ongoing discussions throughout the year.

In 2024, MDPLS hosted more than 60 special TeenTober events, engaging approximately 800 participants. In 2025, we expanded to more than 100 TeenTober events, with over 1,200 teen attendees. Many of these programs were conceived, planned, and led by teens themselves. Branch staff use TeenTober not only to attract new students and build community partnerships, but also to place existing teen groups in the driver's seat at their branches and take thoughtful risks with new and innovative programming.



ENGAGING TEENS AT THE LIBRARY

Conclusion

By addressing teens' diverse need (academic, social, artistic, and technological) and offering numerous opportunities for service and connection, MDPLS has built a large and engaged teen audience. This success is reflected in the overall increased teen participation in programs and in higher circulation of YA materials, both digitally and through physical checkouts. New patron registrations for teens ages 12-19 reached 8,545 in 2024-25, the highest total since 2011. Circulation of physical YA materials has also reached its highest level since 2018, with more than 100,000 physical checkouts. In addition, teens checked out over 4,000 eBooks last fiscal year — double that of 2018-19. Teen participation in events has increased by 200 percent since 2018-19, with more than 6,900 teen events offered in 2024-25 and attendance exceeding 77,000 teens.

Investing in teen services means providing YA staff with the training, support, and inclusion they need to succeed. It also requires viewing all aspects of library services through a teen-centered lens, an approach made possible by actively listening to teens and asking the right questions. When we engage and empower teens, we are not just supporting their development; we are investing in a stronger future for both young people and our communities.



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GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, ETHICS, AND HIGHER EDUCATION

A Literature Review

by Lisa Seymour

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Abstract: This literature review investigates the ethical implications of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in higher education (HE). As GenAI begins to reshape HE fundamentally, ethics must be a significant part of the discussion and woven into every topic examined in this review. This review explores the themes of stakeholder perceptions, building AI literacy in faculty and students, and HE GenAI policies and policy development. Theoretical models guided these themes in the articles selected for this literature review. By applying the theory to the discussion, we can explain the understanding, acceptance, and pedagogical implications of adding GenAI to HE environments. The findings indicate that there is a need for more research and ethically grounded institutional policies, frameworks, and strategies that can help foster AI literacy, academic integrity, and support the faculty in the transformation of their pedagogical practices to allow for the addition of GenAI in the curriculum.

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is not a new technology. The field began in the 1950s as “an exploration of machines mimicking human behavior and cognition.”¹ John McCarthy defined the term as the “science and engineering of making intelligent machines, especially intelligent computer programs.”² While still relevant, how we view AI and access it has changed dramatically. We have come to rely on AI in big and small ways, such as spell check, grammar check, predictive text, social media algorithms, Netflix recommendations, and many more omnipresent applications. Still, the general public may not have realized that these programs relied on AI algorithms. On November 30, 2022, OpenAI’s release of ChatGPT to the public marked the beginning of the GenAI era, fundamentally transforming the world as we know it.³

Some understandings need to be made clear regarding what GenAI is. Wan et al. define GenAI as “a type of AI trained on massive amounts of data. It can generate content in various formats...by processing information through advanced techniques like neural networks and machine learning.”⁴ It is crucial to understand that GenAI has been trained by its programmers, and therefore, it is fallible, as is everything designed by humans. One must also understand what the GPT in ChatGPT means. GPT stands for Generative Pretrained Transformers, and Chan defines them as “a type of generative AI model that uses deep learning techniques to generate natural language text.”⁵ When GenAI is combined with GPT, we get the natural language processing that has become prevalent in the AI Large Language Models (LLMs) that are pervasive in today’s society.

Discussing AI is an essential step in ensuring ethical use; as a result, research journals are ripe with studies. The discussion is also being held outside the scholarly journals in places like *Inside Higher Ed*, which published an article highlighting how the conversation has moved from AI and academic integrity to talking about the pros and cons regarding AI and the equity issues surrounding its adoption and usage.⁶

As AI usage becomes more ubiquitous in our society, it is becoming more widespread among students and professors at HE institutions worldwide. As expected, AI usage in HE is a highly polarizing topic. One professor at the University of Delaware describes a conversation with a student using Google’s Notebook LM in her course. The student highlighted the learning tools and study guides that NotebookLM could generate for him. Still, the assignments the professor gave in the course were complex and required deep thought. The student had turned his work over to AI. The professor could not convince her student that he should take agency of his own learning, and his grades reflected his reliance on AI rather than critical thinking.⁷ In an opinion piece in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, the author stated, “Look at any student academic-integrity policy, and you will find the same message: Submit work that reflects your own thinking or face discipline.”⁸ The author posits this was a good policy before GenAI became widespread, but it is not enough today.⁹ The author further states that “rather than fully embracing AI as a writing assistant, the reasonable conclusion is that there needs to be a split between assignments on which using AI is encouraged and assignments on which using AI can’t possibly help.”¹⁰ Fortunately for the professor and the student, the University of Delaware is trying to develop an AI-literate campus. AI literacy “may be a way to break down barriers between those who see the technology as ripe with potential and those who see it as profoundly harmful.”¹¹

GENERATIVE AI, ETHICS, AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Research Question

GenAI is an educational disruptor that is changing HE. The ease with which GenAI can generate text has HE stakeholders struggling with how to address GenAI in academia. As no conversation about GenAI and academia would be complete without discussing ethics, this literature review will aim to answer the following question: What does the literature say about Generative AI (GenAI) and ethics in higher education (HE)?

Problem of Practice

The research question is derived from a problem of practice observed through library instruction sessions and office hours at Palm Beach State College (PBSC) in Lake Worth, Florida. Librarians have observed a dual challenge of balancing GenAI's benefits as a learning tool against risks such as plagiarism and skill dependency, while examining barriers to faculty adopting GenAI as an educational technology.

Definitions

Throughout the literature, no agreed-upon definition for "ethics" can be found. One definition was selected from the literature to establish a working definition for this literature review. Ethics, which has its basis in philosophy and is best defined by van Wyk as "the systematising, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct, where rights, obligations, benefits, and fairness principles are explained and deliberated in models and frameworks."¹² Ethics is the concept from which the entire basis of this literature review is derived. As the problem of practice relates to libraries, information literacy, and usage, it is essential to define information ethics. For this literature review, the working definition of information ethics is defined as "the control, communication, and the responsibilities associated with the use of information."¹³ The other associated terms that must be defined are AI literacy and AI ethics, which will be defined in detail in the appropriate thematic areas of the review.

Search Strategy

Five databases were selected to search for literature related to the research question: *Library Literature & Information Science Full Text* (H.W. Wilson), *JSTOR*, *ERIC*, *LearnTechLib*, and *Gale Power Search*. The databases were chosen for their relevance to library sciences, social sciences, and education. Lastly, *Gale Power Search* was selected as a general database containing literature on all pertinent topics related to the research question. The Boolean search strings were similar in each database and netted different results from each. This Boolean search string is representative of the searches that were performed in each database: (Generative AI OR Generative Artificial Intelligence OR Gen AI OR Gen AI OR ChatGPT) AND (ethics OR ethical issue OR ethical concerns OR ethical dilemmas) AND (higher education OR college or university OR post-secondary OR postsecondary OR community college).

The inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed, full-text articles from academic journals, and had a higher education context. Articles meeting these criteria were considered. The exclusion criteria applied to all searches. The following were excluded from inclusion in this literature review: any article without a higher education context, conference proceedings, master's theses, doctoral dissertations, books, book chapters, reviews, and non-peer-reviewed articles. All articles returned were reviewed to ensure applicability and appropriateness for inclusion in this literature review.

Snowball searching was utilized within the reference lists of relevant literature to round out the literature search. This strategy helped ensure that adequate literature was discovered to support the themes emerging within the included literature. In addition to snowball searching, SciteAI was used to find additional peer-reviewed literature to support the research question. Finally, LitMaps was used to see the connections between the articles and ensure the topic's full saturation within the relevant literature.

Methodologies

The literature is beginning to outline the growing evidence base regarding artificial intelligence and ethics in HE. The evidence base is growing, but there is still no consensus on what artificial intelligence and ethics look like in the HE setting. Although AI is not new, GenAI and its effects on ethics in HE are newer aspects of an ever-changing field. The ethics of AI is a multifaceted issue that includes stakeholder perceptions, ethical and pedagogical implications. The literature searches show that there are quantitative and qualitative studies, but most are not experimental, and the literature recommends that more experimental research be conducted. The growing body of research includes many systematic literature reviews, where their findings indicate that more quantitative and qualitative research studies are needed and that AI is neither an existential threat nor a panacea for education. Its value is contingent upon literacy, ethics, risk governance, and institutional readiness.



Higher Education Stakeholders

Students

It is essential to distinguish the stakeholders when determining if a particular HE institution will use and adopt GenAI. Güner et al. establish that students are crucial stakeholders in discussing, using, and adopting GenAI into HE coursework.¹⁴ Students will need to be AI literate as they enter the workforce, making them indispensable voices in the discussion as stakeholders regarding GenAI and ethics in HE.¹⁵

Faculty and Professors

Faculty need to be ready technologically and pedagogically for the changes that allowing GenAI into the curriculum in HE brings. To help highlight the needs of the faculty stakeholders, Mathew and Stefaniak ran a study to identify and address “areas to support faculty with becoming more knowledgeable of...Generative AI.”¹⁶ Their study showed that faculty are an integral stakeholder in implementing the addition of GenAI into the HE curriculum. The study also found that in order to facilitate the addition of GenAI into the curriculum, faculty training and professional development are needed to prepare faculty for the challenge of adapting their pedagogy and curriculum for GenAI.¹⁷

Administration

As a stakeholder in the implementation of GenAI, the administration is a key player. GenAI can streamline administration and increase productivity.¹⁸ On the other hand, college administrators must develop a policy for their institution that “deals with the ethical and educational ramifications of AI.”¹⁹ The administration needs to work with faculty, students, and AI developers to tackle the issues and concerns of adopting and implementing GenAI into HE coursework.²⁰

Thematic Analysis of the Literature

Stakeholder Perceptions and Roles

Wan et al. addressed stakeholder perceptions and found a great variety within those perceptions.²¹ The disparity within the stakeholder perceptions was most evident when looking at responses about effective AI policies and academic integrity standards. This section will discuss the different perceptions and roles of the various stakeholder groups: administration, faculty, and students.

Administration. The administration is dualistic when it comes to perceptions and roles. The administration must examine how it uses and perceives AI as a group, as well as whether it wants to address Generative AI and its pros and perils with policy. They need to address GenAI with student, faculty, and administrative policies.²² Some of the key issues that administrators need to deal with are issues related to privacy and data security, the potential and abilities of generative AI, and its limitations.²³ In their 2025 study, An et al. analyzed the policies of 50 universities and found that while most had policies for students and faculty, very few addressed administrative use of AI. HE administrations will be on the front lines of the GenAI adoption process; however, “administrators need to adopt proactive strategies to ensure responsible and ethical AI use...and be active in implementation and promoting use.”²⁴ While many studies address the need for an administrative approach and the development of AI policies, little to no research has been conducted on the perceptions of HE administration.

Faculty and Professors. Many professors feel that guidelines, policies, or directions for implementing GenAI in HE are lacking, and when they do exist, they are vague.²⁵ If GenAI is adopted into the pedagogy of HE courses, then there needs to be clear direction from the administration for the faculty and clear guidelines for the students. There is a feeling among faculty that although AI literacy must be a part of the pedagogy when HE institutions adopt GenAI, there needs to be a shift towards adding “technological intelligence” skills.²⁶ The results of the study show that most faculty view implementing AI across the curriculum positively. They feel that to implement it successfully, “AI literacy is needed in the curriculum to search and evaluate information and to help students achieve educational goals.”²⁷ This philosophy is echoed throughout Southworth et al.’s seminal paper, “Developing a Model for AI Across the Curriculum: Transforming the Higher Education Landscape Via Innovation in AI Literacy.”²⁸ As long as that criterion is met, there is the belief that its addition makes the curriculum stronger.²⁹ While faculty in some disciplines do not oppose the addition of AI to the curriculum, they posit that their curriculum needs to be modernized so that it can accommodate the adoption of AI.³⁰

14. Güner et al., 2024

15. Alshahrani et al., 2024

16. Mathew & Stefaniak, 2024, p. 777

17. Mathew & Stefaniak, 2024

18. Al-Zahrani & Alasmari, 2024

19. Al-Zahrani & Alasmari, 2024, p. 10

20. Zhou & Chen, 2023, p. 2697

21. Wan et al., 2025

22-23. An et al., 2025

24. Spence et al., 2025, p. 119

25. Alshahrani et al., 2024

26. Salhab, 2024, p. 2

27. Alshahrani et al., 2024, p. 2

28. Southworth et al., 2023

29-30. Salhab, 2024

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Students. Güner et al. examined students' attitudes and perceptions towards using ChatGPT in their coursework, using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as their theoretical framework. They found that if students perceived that ChatGPT was useful, then they were more likely to use it in their coursework.³¹ Barrios and Déri also used TAM to look at the perceived usefulness of ChatGPT. Their findings show that students in STEM-related coursework were more likely to use ChatGPT in their studies than their peers in social science and humanities coursework.³² Malik et al. took a slightly different approach to the discussion of students using GenAI technology in their coursework by examining the reasons for using it as opposed to not using it in their writing. They found that students were more likely to use it to brainstorm ideas, to analyze data, to help avoid plagiarism, and for proofreading. Students' reasons for not using GenAI in their work included a lack of originality in their writing, feeling that their critical thinking skills would be compromised, the accuracy of the information output, bias in information output, and technological overreliance.³³ The literature indicated that more research is needed on student perspectives on GenAI and how they use it in their coursework.

Ethical Challenges to Adoption and Implementation

Artificial intelligence brings with it a host of challenges that must be addressed before it is adopted and implemented in HE settings. These challenges include academic integrity, bias, transparency, and how humans collaborate with AI.³⁴

Academic Integrity and Misconduct

Academic integrity is a construct that has many facets and is made up of six fundamental principles that collectively define its essence. These core components include honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage. Each element serves a distinct role in fostering an ethical academic environment.³⁵ In HE, discussions of academic integrity have been *de rigueur* for decades. In a broad study of around 70,000 undergraduates, researchers "found 39 percent of the students admitted to 'cheating' on tests, 62 percent confessed to misconduct in written assignments, and 68 percent acknowledged wrongdoing in both areas."³⁶ These conversations have taken on new importance since the release of ChatGPT. There is evidence indicating that when presented with the opportunity, many will use technology to engage in academic misconduct, and ChatGPT makes this even easier.³⁷⁻³⁹ These findings show that continuing conversations and instruction for students on what academic integrity and misconduct are and how to avoid them are even more critical now than ever before. Information ethics needs to be embedded into every course.

Bias and Fairness

No conversation about ethics and GenAI in HE would be complete without examining bias and misinformation.⁴⁰ Memarian and Doleck apply the Fairness, Accountability, Transparency, and Ethics (FATE) framework to GenAI in HE. Fairness and bias both play a role in using and adopting GenAI as an educational tool in HE. To understand these concepts, a definition of fairness and biases needs to be added to the discussion, and Memarian and Doleck define fairness in AI and HE as "the landscape, culture, situation, or practice that attempts to make unfair practices just and/or mitigate bias."⁴¹ To fully understand how to mitigate bias as it relates to fairness, we must define bias as it relates to GenAI. Bias as used in the construct of fairness is defined as "measurement and error imbalances in how well a model performs across groups, to systematic skew in results, to disparate impacts and discrimination as model results are applied."⁴²

As humans train GenAI models on vast amounts of data, there is a possibility that the data contains biases, which is a critical part of the conversation surrounding bias and GenAI.⁴³ Melisa et al. examined the effects of GenAI on HE, and bias was one of the concepts addressed. They found that many researchers have highlighted bias and misinformation as a significant concern in the adoption of GenAI in HE.⁴⁴ When students begin to use GenAI in their HE coursework, there is a "risk of students learning incorrect or biased information if they rely on ChatGPT without verifying accuracy."⁴⁵

In discussing the issues of bias and fairness with GenAI, it is essential to address the "data biases to ensure the ethical deployment of GenAI technologies within higher education contexts."⁴⁶ All of the literature examined regarding bias and fairness suggests that these concepts need to be addressed, and further research on these topics and how they affect students is required.

31. Güner et al., 2024

32. Barrios and Déri, 2025

33. Malik et al., 2023

34. Ogunleye et al., 2024

35. Eke, 2023

36. International Center for Academic Integrity 2020, as cited in Duah & McGivern, 2024, p. 181

37. Duah & McGivern, 2024;

38. Prihar & Wanna, 2019;

39. Snepvangers, 2023

40. Bukar et al., 2024

41. Memarian & Doleck, 2023, p. 5

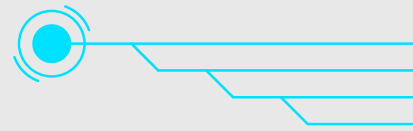
42. Baker and Hawn, p. 4 as cited by Memarian & Doleck, 2023, p. 5

43. Nartey, 2024

44. Melisa et al., 2025

45. Valova et al., 2024, as cited in Melisa et al., 2025, p. 9

46. Nartey, 2024, p. 5



Transparency and Accountability

Transparency and accountability are key components in the discussion of ethics and GenAI in HE, and the research indicates that there are two levels of transparency in this conversation.⁴⁷ Transparency at a high level is most often spoken of regarding policies for the use of GenAI,⁴⁸ and will be discussed later in this review. In the context of ethics, transparency deals with the algorithms used in the programming and the return of information from a LLM⁴⁹ and student data privacy.⁵⁰⁻⁵¹ Holmes et al. pose an interesting addition to the conversation with the idea of an “open approach to better inform the users’ choices and transparency of what we create.”⁵² Overall, more research in this area is needed; however, this is a complicated issue. We need to have more transparency from the AI models themselves and be able to trust that they are being transparent with how they are analyzing and using data.⁵³ Protecting our data and privacy, and knowing how the LLM we are using is doing this, is paramount when talking about transparency and accountability. Until we can trust that the LLM is being fully transparent, we should proceed with caution when using GenAI in HE to maintain ethics at both the macro and micro levels.⁵⁴

Human-AI Collaboration

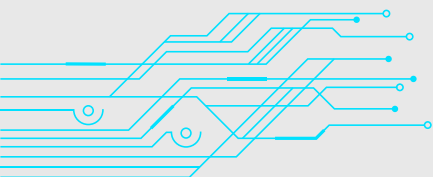
If we are to maintain ethics when implementing GenAI, we must be open and transparent about its usage. There must be policies and procedures in place for GenAI use, but a key part of this conversation is that there also must be a human-AI collaboration. This component in the discussion of ethics may be the most important one due to the need for a human voice in utilizing GenAI technologies with ethics in mind. If one decides to use GenAI, it will be in large part due to their perceptions of AI.⁵⁵ Without infusing “human values” into GenAI usage, ethics, and the ethics of information usage, have been turned over to machines.⁵⁶ Research has shown that without the policies, procedures, and emphasis on the “human skills like creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking,”⁵⁷ it is possible we will lose valuable skills and perhaps walk the line between being ethical or unethical in the use of GenAI.

Pedagogical Implications and AI Integration

When ChatGPT was released to the public in November 2022, it quickly gained millions of users.⁵⁸ Many in the educational community feared that traditional assessments, like the research paper, were no longer viable options.⁵⁹ While conventional assessments still have a place in HE, GenAI is proving to be an academic disruptor, and we need to adjust our teaching methods to accommodate GenAI’s presence in the HE curricula.⁶⁰ Educators are worried about AI’s presence; however, AI could transform teaching and learning practices for the better.⁶¹⁻⁶² Exemplary pedagogical practices are the backbone of teaching and learning, and they prioritize “the empowerment of learners to engage in a critical analysis of their social and political environments, facilitating the development of a profound comprehension of the world.”⁶³ GenAI is causing a shift in pedagogy, and while there are many downsides, it has benefits as well. Godsk and Elving highlighted these benefits in their 2024 study, showcasing how they benefit both students and faculty. The two most potent benefits are: assisting instructors in creating and providing sample material to be used in their teaching practice, and, from a student perspective, using GenAI to help explain concepts and summarize articles. GenAI, if used to promote active learning while still teaching the critical thinking skills students need, can enhance teaching and learning.⁶⁴

Assessment Redesign

For all the benefits GenAI can bring to HE curricula, a pedagogical shift and assessment redesign will be necessary. Assessments must be created so that students will not be able to simply feed their assignment into ChatGPT and have it spit out an answer. We need to redesign assessments to allow for higher-order thinking and require students to synthesize their knowledge. Part of the redesign means removing the taboo of incorporating GenAI into assignments and building it into them in a way that supports active and constructivist learning activities.⁶⁵ It is crucial to note that in order for this to happen, faculty need to look at GenAI as a learning tool and not as a means to cheat.⁶⁶ When designing assessments to accommodate GenAI, it is imperative to begin with an idea of what the learning process should look like, and incorporate critical thinking skills and the construction of knowledge⁶⁷ where GenAI is used; by doing this, the potential for using it to cheat is mitigated greatly.⁶⁸ To design successful learning experiences using GenAI, the assessments need to look more at critical thinking skills and the building of knowledge, more than the end product.⁶⁹ When the way faculty look at GenAI is flipped from it being a cheating tool to a knowledge construction tool, “the knowledge that is formed originates from the individual’s mind and is influenced by their experiences and interpretations of the context.”⁷⁰



47-49. Memarian & Doleck, 2023

50. Francis et al., 2025;

51. Melisa et al., 2025

52-54. Holmes et al., 2022, p. 520

55-56. Al-Zahrani & Alasmari, 2024, p. 10

57. Siham & Sophia, 2024, as cited in Haroud & Saqri, 2025, p. 2

58. RavSelj et al., 2025

59-60. Seymour, 2024

61. Nayir et al., 2024

62. Slade et al., 2024

63. Nayir et al., 2024, p. 103

64. Godsk & Elving, 2024, p. 43

65-70. Kim & Adlof, 2024, p. 43-44

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Allowing the use of GenAI does require that faculty teach students to critically evaluate the output they receive from LLMs and to not just accept GenAI results at face value as reliable information. Evaluating GenAI output requires students to use critical thinking skills to assess the information and responses that come from using GenAI in their learning, which is a valuable skill for students to learn.⁷¹⁻⁷² To give students the parameters from which to include GenAI in their work, faculty need to generate an AI usage policy for their assignments so that students have the parameters and guidelines for the ethical use of GenAI in their work.⁷³ Without teaching these skills and giving students an understanding of how GenAI works, the potential for a breakdown in academic integrity exists.⁷⁴ When these conditions are met, GenAI can be a powerful learning tool in active learning environments.

AI-Enhanced Formative Feedback

Southworth et al. envision faculty using AI to help grade work and provide feedback to students, which will free up faculty to spend their time helping students learn.⁷⁵ They are not suggesting that faculty should rely solely on GenAI to provide feedback to their students; they need to thoughtfully look at what the LLM gives them, which may be generic, and then customize it to their specific students' needs so that the feedback is genuine and personalized.⁷⁶⁻⁷⁷

Using GenAI for feedback has the potential to enhance the productivity of faculty in what is an extraordinarily time-intensive task, giving them more time to work with their students and improving the overall educational experience. AI-enhanced feedback is not only a boon to faculty, but it has the potential to be a valuable tool for students. GenAI can help students get immediate feedback as they are working on their assignments. This usefulness is highlighted in Haroud and Saqri's study "Generative AI in Higher Education: Teachers' and Students' Perspectives on Support, Replacement, and Digital Literacy," where one student participant stated, "the immediate feedback that AI provides is very useful. It allows me to know directly where I'm going wrong and to rectify my mistakes without waiting for feedback from the teacher."⁷⁸ When used to generate immediate feedback for students on their work, GenAI has the potential to help them improve academically and become more successful students. The combination of freeing up faculty time to help students and students getting more immediate feedback during the completion of their assignments is powerful, and the benefits of this cannot be overlooked. The research points to more studies that need to be done to see the full potential benefits of AI-enhanced feedback.

Building AI Literacy: Training and Professional Development

A significant theme throughout the literature is that both students and faculty need training on what GenAI is, how it works, and best practices in using it for teaching and learning. Before we can discuss what training is needed for faculty and students, there needs to be agreed-upon definitions of what AI literacy is and what it means to be AI literate. For this literature review, the definitions used by Laupichler et al. will be adopted. They define AI literate as "The ability to understand, use, monitor, and critically reflect on AI applications without necessarily being able to develop AI models themselves"⁷⁹ and AI literacy as "a set of competencies that enables individuals to critically evaluate AI technologies, communicate and collaborate effectively with AI, and use AI as a tool online, at home, and in the workplace."⁸⁰

For faculty, many feel they do not understand AI and its capabilities as a teaching tool for active learning. This feeling is highlighted by Mathew and Stefaniak in their study, where they found that between 40 percent and 60 percent of the faculty felt that they needed professional development in AI competencies. They feel that professional development opportunities like online seminars, coupled with hands-on training opportunities, are required before they can decide on whether or how to integrate Generative AI into their teaching pedagogy. The faculty studied feel that students (29 percent) are using the technology to support their critical and analytical thinking.⁸¹ These training opportunities will complement the use of technology to support critical thinking, ensure the faculty understands technologies like ChatGPT, and better assist them in incorporating the technology into their coursework.

Students also need to be taught how to use GenAI for knowledge building, not to complete assignments. In library literature, there is a consensus that AI literacy needs to be incorporated into professors' pedagogy and HE curricula. Librarians have a significant role to play in developing AI skills and competencies for the university community and promoting AI fluency within the university.⁸² Academic libraries can be the place where not only are students taught how to use GenAI ethically within their work, but professors and faculty can receive the support they need for integrating these new technologies and skills into their curricula,⁸³ ensuring that when the students enter the workforce they are ready to handle the challenges and opportunities of an AI-enabled world.

71. Kim & Adlof, 2024

72. Whitbread et al., 2025

73-74. Whitbread et al., 2025, p. 44

75. Southworth et al., 2023

76. Baidoo-Anu & Owusu Ansah, 2023

77. Southworth et al., 2023

78. Haroud and Saqri, 2025, p.8

79. Laupichler et al., 2022, p. 1

80. Long and Mageko, 2020, p.2, as cited by

Laupichler et al., 2022, p. 1

81. Mathew & Stefaniak, 2024

82-83. Chigwada, 2024

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To ensure that students have the AI literacy that they need, a suggestion would be to add a framework such as Critical AI Literacy (CAIL) to the information literacy curriculum in HE institutions, which broadens information literacy instruction to include AI literacy.⁸⁴ The CAIL framework comprises four constructs, which are: “1) Knowing and Understanding; 2) Using and Applying; 3) Evaluating and Creating; and 4) Ethical Issues.”⁸⁵ This framework is both multidisciplinary and engages a humanistic and intersectional approach to AI literacy, which is critical for students to understand and grasp the issues and complexities of using GenAI in their studies.⁸⁶ CAIL can also be a framework that faculty can use to incorporate GenAI technologies into their pedagogy and curriculum, and to help their students navigate and understand the bias present in GenAI.⁸⁷

Policy Development and Governance of AI in Education

The academic literature is in agreement that HE institutions need to develop policies for AI usage and governance. These policies, usually generated by the administration, will allow for a top-down approach whereby the institution sets a policy, a department sets its requirements, and individual faculty members can dictate how and when GenAI usage is permitted in their assignments. The policies give the institution the structure it needs to allow for Generative AI-enhanced curricula while still allowing faculty to set the parameters for use in the coursework in congruence with their institutional policy. An et al. studied the policies of 50 U.S colleges and universities.⁸⁸ They analyzed what guidelines were in place and outlined what these schools felt were the most important topics to include, and they found those were: “integration of GenAI in learning and assessment; Gen AI in visual, interactive, and multimodal media; security and ethical considerations in GenAI; and GenAI in academic integrity.”⁸⁹ These topics can serve as a beginning for schools without policies in place and help them generate policies that incorporate all aspects of GenAI so that integration into curricula can take place.

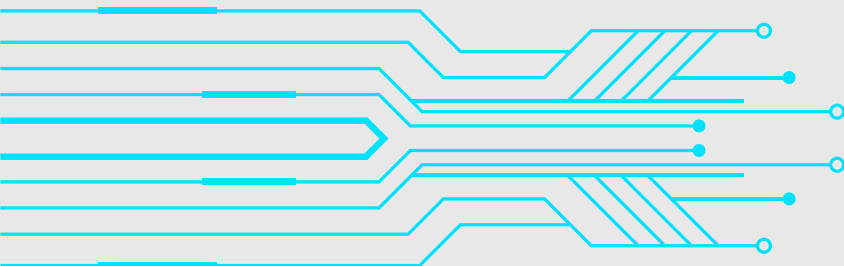
Existing Policy Models

AI Ecological Education Policy Framework. There is an ethical challenge when discussing the policies for and the integration of GenAI into a HE institution. The institution must provide students and faculty with clear guidelines.⁹⁰ Establishing policies for the use of GenAI helps acquaint faculty and students with key challenges of institution-wide implementation, including ethics, the boundary between idea generation and plagiarism, and appropriate use. The setting of these policies will help the institutional community better understand these issues.⁹¹

Chan recommends an Ecological Education Policy Framework, which takes into consideration three dimensions: governance (administration), pedagogy (faculty), and operational (Teaching and Learning and IT staff), and gives students, teachers, staff, and management clear direction on the incorporation of GenAI into the institution. This type of policy allows for faculty to examine assessment design and balance the skills they want and need their students to have while still preparing them for a workplace environment that will require them to be AI literate.⁹² The framework also allows the institution to set the tone with how they want to address concerns with GenAI, such as academic misconduct, ethics, data privacy, plagiarism, and equity.⁹³ Lastly, the model allows for the operational side of the institution to keep their eye on and see how the implementation is progressing, which gives it the knowledge needed to help faculty, staff, and students with the training and education necessary for a successful implementation of GenAI into the institution.⁹⁴

Decentralized AI Governance

In an examination of the AI policies of the Big Ten Universities, Wu et al. found that these universities have decided to take a less top-down approach and have given faculty greater freedom and the self-determination to set guidelines that work for their pedagogy and their learning environment or learning space.⁹⁵ For example, Purdue University does not have an official policy. It states that it “continues to support the autonomy and choice of faculty and instructors to utilize instructional technology that best suits their teaching and learning environments.”⁹⁶ While positions such as that of Purdue University give faculty academic autonomy, there are missing components that are found in the Ecological Policy Framework, which are crucial and cannot be overlooked, such as equity, data privacy, and ethics.⁹⁷



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Institutional Responses to Policy Development

As HE continues to navigate the addition of if and when GenAI technologies are introduced to the institution and into curricula, this phenomenon has elicited a variety of institutional responses. Sullivan et al. point to the need for policy development that includes all institutional stakeholders.⁹⁸ At the same time, Dabis and Csáki advocate for both a “top-down and bottom-up” approach to institutional policies for Generative AI.⁹⁹ In general, the academic literature points to the need for more research on HE AI policies and greater institutional responses.¹⁰⁰⁻¹⁰³ In addition to more research being needed to help HE institutions create policies, there also needs to be clear ethical frameworks developed to guide these policies, as highlighted by Alshahrani et al. and Sullivan et al.

Main Theories, Models, and Frameworks

Throughout the literature, the main theories identified pertain to technology acceptance, adoption, pedagogy, and content. The theories discussed are the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM);¹⁰⁴⁻¹⁰⁵ Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT);¹⁰⁶⁻¹⁰⁹ Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology2 (UTAUT2);¹¹⁰⁻¹¹ Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge Framework (TPACK);¹¹²⁻¹³ and Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition (SAMR).¹¹⁴ These theories attempt to explain how and why technology like GenAI is accepted or not accepted.¹¹⁵

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

TAM was developed and introduced in 1989, when computers were first being introduced to education.¹¹⁶ In the literature, TAM has been used to examine GenAI adoption through “perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, attitude toward using, and intention to use technology,”¹¹⁷ the four constructs of TAM. Barrios and Déri postulate that the younger a student is, the more likely they are to use and adopt GenAI into their studies and work.¹¹⁸ Alaseed et al. contribute to the discussion by showing that the more the technology is perceived as easy to use and valuable in their work, the more likely faculty and students are to use it.¹¹⁹ While the constructs of TAM, when examining the use of GenAI, show why it is being used and accepted, it is essential to look at information literacy instruction to allow for the ethical use of GenAI during its acceptance phase. Meakin used TAM to discuss the use of GenAI through the lens of the library and show that it has a place in HE curricula. Unless students receive digital literacy and information evaluation skills, they will be at an extreme disadvantage. Students at these institutions will be at an academic advantage if they avail themselves of the services provided by the library and academic librarians when accepting and using GenAI in their studies.¹²⁰

Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) and Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2)

Vantkesh et al. developed both the UTAUT (2003) and UTAUT2 (2012) theories, which created a solid theoretical framework that can be applied and used when adopting and integrating new technologies, like GenAI, into HE environments. When HE institutions are developing policies and laying the groundwork for students and faculty to use GenAI, the technology must be looked at with an ethical lens, and theories like UTAUT and UTAUT2 assist with this task.¹²¹ Haroud and Saqri posit that students and faculty will look at the adoption and use of GenAI differently, and UTAUT provides a framework for looking at these differences.¹²² When deciding to use or adopt GenAI, students and faculty are tasked with an ethical dilemma, and many factors go into that decision-making.¹²³ UTAUT and UTAUT2 can be used to help students and faculty examine their usage through the needed ethical lens that is required when adopting a technology like GenAI.¹²⁴⁻²⁵

Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge Framework (TPACK) and Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition (SAMR)

The TPACK framework (Koehler et al., 2013) gives the basis for faculty to make decisions on whether or not to incorporate the use of GenAI into their pedagogical practices, as it allows for the technology to be examined through technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge perspectives.¹²⁶⁻²⁷ Using TPACK is a good starting point; however, Celik showed that TPACK can be integrated with the FATE framework, making a stronger case for using ethics when integrating GenAI into the technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge perspectives.¹²⁸

98. Sullivan et al., 2023, p. 36
99. Dabis & Csáki, 2024, p. 10
100. Chan, 2023
101. Dabis & Csáki, 2024
102. Sullivan et al., 2023
103. Wu et al., 2024
104. Đerić et al., 2025
105. Meakin, 2024
106. Đerić et al., 2025;
107. Dwivedi et al., 2019
108. Haroud & Saqri, 2025
109. Zhu et al., 2025
110. Đerić et al., 2025
111. Zhu et al., 2025
112. Celik, 2023
113. Mah & Groß, 2024

114. Haroud & Saqri, 2025
115. Đerić et al., 2025
116. Davis et al., 1989, as cited in Barrios & Déri, 2025
117. Meakin, 2024, p. 2
118. Barrios and Déri, 2025
119. Alaseed et al., 2025
120. Meakin, 2024
121. Zhu et al., 2025
122. Haroud and Saqri, 2025
123. Đerić et al., 2025
124. Haroud & Saqri, 2025
125. Zhu et al., 2025
- 126-27. Mah & Groß, 2024
128. Celik, 2023

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While the UTAUT and UTAUT2 models have provided a way to look at the noted distinctions between faculty and students regarding the key factors in both UTAUT models, such as “perceived usefulness, social norms, and facilitating conditions,”¹²⁹ we cannot ignore the need for the human component of teaching and learning. The SAMR model examines what role technology has in shaping pedagogical approaches.¹³⁰ While TAM, UTAUT, and UTAUT2 look at the path to adoption or acceptance of technology, which is a key component when new technologies such as GenAI are introduced, TPACK and SAMR allow us to examine the pedagogical shifts created by technology, in this case, GenAI technologies. As we examine the adoption or acceptance of GenAI in HE and continue to determine the ethical ramifications of its addition into the pedagogy, we must not only look at adoption theories, but also include theories and models like SAMR and TPACK to give us a clearer understanding of how the technology impacts pedagogy and ethics in HE.

Recommendations From the Literature

Although there is abundant literature on the topic of GenAI and ethics in higher education, the topic is new and evolving quickly. There is consensus throughout the academic literature that more research is needed on every theme present in this literature review. More research is recommended because a deeper understanding of the impact GenAI is having on ethics and HE is required, because it is a quickly changing topic. There are some specific recommendations, and these are universal. The first is that training for both students and faculty is required in order to assist both stakeholder groups in “effectively using and integrating Generative AI technologies into teaching and learning practices.”¹³¹ Second, instruction on digital literacies and competencies is needed to ready students for an GenAI-enabled world.¹³²⁻³⁴ Policies must be developed at the institutional level and include necessary guardrails that ensure GenAI is used ethically and that the risks associated with its implementation as a learning tool are mitigated to allow faculty to use these policies when creating guidelines for AI usage in their courses.¹³⁵⁻³⁶

Data privacy and security are paramount when discussing ethics and GenAI in HE. Wu et al. postulate that before GenAI is incorporated into an HE institution, the institution should review specific GenAI technologies to ensure that the institution's security requirements are met.¹³⁷ This review will ensure “data privacy and security”¹³⁸ are protected when using GenAI technologies.

When incorporating GenAI technologies in HE and allowing their use in teaching and learning, a human-AI connection needs to be maintained.¹³⁹ GenAI technologies must be used as auxiliary tools to help faculty and students, never to supplant a faculty member or a student's original work.¹⁴⁰ To maintain the human-AI connection, there needs to be an ongoing dialogue in which faculty and students can discuss both the “benefits and concerns associated with using AI technologies in higher education,”¹⁴¹ thus leading to learning how to harness these tools as assistants while maintaining ethics and academic integrity.¹⁴²⁻⁴³

Discussion

The ethical concerns surrounding GenAI, like academic integrity, bias, transparency, and human-AI collaboration, are all discussed at length. However, these themes are only addressed at the university level, thereby excluding community colleges from the discussion. Community colleges cater to highly diverse populations and often face unique institutional constraints. For example, while studies such as Duah and McGivern highlight academic misconduct as a prominent risk of GenAI use,¹⁴⁴ virtually no work was found evaluating how these risks play out in two-year institutions, where many students may not have been exposed to information literacy, AI literacy, or research prior to enrolling as a student.

Similarly, while Melisa et al. found that bias and misinformation are significant risks in GenAI-driven pedagogy,¹⁴⁵ no literature was found detailing how these risks are magnified in environments with fewer resources, like community colleges. This omission is troubling given that institutions of higher education, like community colleges, disproportionately serve first-generation, minoritized, or low-income students. Many community college students are members of marginalized groups that may be particularly susceptible to issues of algorithmic bias present in GenAI,¹⁴⁶⁻⁴⁷ making the study of this population crucial with regard to HE and ethics.

129. Kamhi & Salahddine, 2020, as cited by Haroud & Saqri, 2025, p. 11

130. Puentedura, 2014

131. Cordero et al., 2024, p. 12

132. Chan, 2023

133. Kim & Adlof, 2024

134. Southworth et al., 2023

135. Chan, 2023

136. Wu et al., 2024

137. Wu et al., 2024

138. Chan, 2023, p. 12

139. Nayir et al., 2024

140-41. Chan, 2023, p. 12

142. Cordero et al., 2024

143. Southworth et al., 2023

144. Duah and McGivern, 2024

145. Melisa et al., 2025

146. Nartey, 2024

147. Valova et al., 2024, as cited in Melisa et al., 2025

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Tools like ChatGPT are forcing a reevaluation of traditional assessment methods such as research papers and encouraging integration of more adaptive, critical-thinking-driven assessments.¹⁴⁸ However, these discussions are framed predominantly around faculty at the university level. No data was found regarding how faculty at community colleges, who often face higher teaching loads, are responding to and dealing with the required pedagogical shift. Godsk and Elving point to powerful opportunities for GenAI integration.¹⁴⁹ Without access to institutional support or professional development, such shifts may be far less feasible in two-year environments. Across the literature, a recurring theme is the need for GenAI-specific education directed at both students and faculty. Despite this, the absence of research on implementation in community colleges is striking. While studies have emphasized frameworks like Critical AI Literacy (CAIL) for undergraduates,¹⁵⁰ it remains unclear how such frameworks are scaffolded into non-university curricula or short-term certificate programs.

Faculty also express varying levels of AI readiness. In the study by Mathew and Stefaniak, 40–60 percent of faculty reported a need for professional development before integrating GenAI into their instruction.¹⁵¹ Though helpful, these findings do not disaggregate for community college settings. Similarly, Chigwada proposes employing librarians as facilitators of AI fluency.¹⁵² This idea would benefit from specific application studies in the community college system, where library services are often underutilized.

Another gap in the literature that bears looking into involves administrative perceptions of GenAI. The lack of administrative perceptions is a surprising finding given the role administrators play at HE institutions. An et al. analyzed institutional policies and found that while many HE institutions have frameworks for students and faculty, few include administrative policies or perspectives.¹⁵³ When administrators were discussed, the focus was on what should be done; no data addressed what administrators perceived as they faced decisions about integrating GenAI into their operations and institutional curriculum.¹⁵⁴ The success or failure of GenAI implementation depends heavily on the leadership capacity and ethical awareness of administrators; without research into how administrators in HE perceive GenAI's role, potential, or risks, any policy development may be reactionary rather than strategic.

Conclusions

This literature review confirms that the academic literature is already covering many vital aspects of GenAI and ethics in higher education. The literature is rich and diverse and spans many sectors of the globe. It is important to note two gaps in the literature that must be addressed going forward: the institutional context of community colleges and the role of administrative perception in shaping policy and practice. New research needs to address these topics to ensure that ethical, pedagogical, and governance conversations include all sectors of higher education, including community colleges. The next steps will be to bring community colleges into the evolving conversation within academic literature about AI and ethics in higher education.

- 148. Kim & Adlof, 2024
- 149. Godsk and Elving, 2024
- 150. Wan et al., 2025
- 151. Mathew and Stefaniak, 2024
- 152. Chigwada, 2024
- 153. An et al., 2025
- 154. Spence et al., 2025

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