Kristell Benson

Lead Archivist

Q: Currently, what does the process for cataloging at Saint Olaf look like, and how would you describe it (tedious, easy, thorough, etc)? What improvements would you like to see within this process?

A: While I am not particularly familiar with the cataloging of books in our library collections (that is done by my colleagues in Acquisitions and Resource Management) I can speak to the description and processing of our archival collections.

Our processing procedures begin with accessioning. When material is either donated or transferred to us, a staff member works with the donor or transferring department. The materials are then reviewed and we decide whether or not it should be added to an already established collection or if it becomes a new collection. Our processing archivist then begins the actual description work. They look through the materials, decide how they are best organized, physically arrange the materials and house them properly. They then input all the necessary information about the collection into our database. (This is an extremely simplified description of the process.)

We have discovered that the majority of our archival collections here at St. Olaf contain at least some records that are either legally protected or contain private information that needs to be restricted for a period of time. Because of this, we do have to be quite thorough when surveying collections and the description of those records often needs to be done at a more granular level… which means it is definitely more time consuming. I am always looking for different ways to improve efficiency, as long as it doesn't impact accuracy or put any protected information at risk. That being said, sometimes, especially with certain collections, it just takes human time to do something. (For example, documents can be scanned and OCRd and then analyzed by AI for content, but scanning, and especially digitization which is even more time consuming, is still work that needs to use human input/labor before AI can "see" it.)

Even though much of the description process cannot be automated, I try to stay aware of the emerging technologies that could be useful.

Q: Have you had any experience with AI in an archive context?

A: Very little, I have just started thinking about how to use some of the tools at our disposal here in the Libraries and IT for our different processes and projects. I have also been looking into

how other archives use AI. Also, I am sure that there are numerous ways I use AI in my work that I am not even aware of (for example, I am eternally grateful for spellcheck!)

Q: In general, how do you feel about AI being used as an archival tool? Examples include handwritten text recognition and natural language processing (can be used to catalog and make correlations between items).

A: I am personally always a little hesitant when it comes to using new technologies, usually due to my own lack of knowledge. But I think there are numerous ways the archival field can benefit from their use. As long as these technologies are being used as an aid to human efforts, rather than in place of it, I think it is important we utilize what we can in order to improve our processes.

Q: Have you considered using AI for Saint Olaf's archive system? If so, what are some of the barriers you might come across in attempting to implement these tools?

A: I have been considering how we can utilize different tools in our processes, I think it would be short-sighted of me not to. We have already used a program to transcribe and translate some Norwegian language documents we have in our collection, and I am looking at using AI to help us create alt text for some of our digital images.
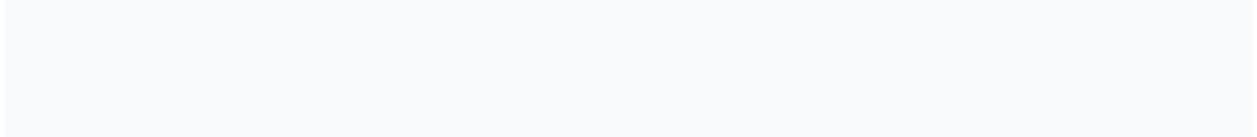
One of the biggest barriers is my own limitations. It takes time to learn about and figure out how to use these programs. It is why I am so grateful for my colleagues in both libraries and IT. Many of them are much more aware of these technologies and are invaluable in their help in figuring them out.

Q: With the use of AI comes ethical dilemmas, such as the existence of bias and environmental concerns. In your opinion, would AI's implementation in archives outweigh these concerns?

A: The nature of archival material leads to numerous ethical considerations. I think that archivists always have to take those types of considerations into account as we do our work, regardless of the types of technologies we use. I don't think that there is a universal yes or no answer to the question of whether or not the benefits of AI outweigh the potential drawbacks. I think that each archive and archivist has to weigh the value using those technologies would add versus any harm using them could do. I also think there are ways to mitigate that harm and even improve the technologies as we learn to use them.

Q: Jane Winters, a professor of Digital Humanities at the School of Advanced Study in the University of London states that "[GLAMS institutions] are responsible for high-quality data that could be used to develop large language models with transparency and fairness in mind. Without their input, decisions about AI's application in cultural heritage will be made without their valuable perspectives." To what degree do you agree with this statement?

A: I think when working with and creating new technologies, it is important to do as much research as possible. That means talking to people in multiple fields, especially if those fields are directly impacted or related to the technology. I think collaboration is essential when creating these systems.

Audrey Gunn

Research and Instruction Librarian for Natural Sciences and English

Q: Currently, does AI impact your job as librarian at Saint Olaf?

A: I would say it impacts my job to some degree. I'm engaged in conversations *about* teaching with AI on a very regular basis, typically with faculty, fellow librarians, and instructional technologists. I serve on the library/IT's AI Impact Team, which is responsible for providing some leadership and resources about AI to the rest of campus, such as workshops and the AI research guide. However, I spend a lot more time thinking about and discussing AI than I do actually using it at this point. I've used it occasionally to create the first draft of an email or to help me understand a difficult concept (which I then verify is accurate using non-AI resources). But for my core work, such as writing lesson plans, teaching, and meeting with students, it hasn't had a huge impact yet.

Q: Have you had any experience with AI in a library context?

A: Yes. I occasionally have students decide to use AI to assist with understanding general concepts that they're researching, and it can be very effective in that context. I also have a little experience using AI in my own teaching; I worked with a class last spring where the faculty member asked me to incorporate AI, and we were able to use Gemini very effectively to help identify and brainstorm keywords for students to use in their research. Finally, many library vendors (the companies that supply our databases and such) are coming out with AI tools, and I've had some experience with evaluating those.

Q: In general, how do you feel about the potential of AI being used as a source finder?

A: I think AI has the potential to be very useful for finding sources. While I have some reservations about using GenAI itself as a source of information (since it can get things very wrong), I think that having more tools available to find credible sources is generally a good thing. At least for now, I would not want to see AI replace other research tools (such as traditional library databases), since each has its strengths and weaknesses, but I don't have an issue with AI tools used alongside other research tools.

Q: Have you considered using AI in Saint Olaf's library system? If so, what are some of the barriers you might come across in attempting to implement this tool?

A: Yes, we've considered it, but haven't actually implemented anything ourselves. I can give you a few examples: 1) The database Web of Science now offers an "AI research assistant." The research assistant is only available for an additional fee, and we aren't inclined to pursue anything fee-based with library vendors yet, when so many other AI tools are available for free or through existing library subscriptions. 2) At least one library database, JSTOR, has implemented an AI tool that is included in the cost of our existing subscription. We didn't have to do anything to "turn on" this tool, so it's available for any of our patrons to use. JSTOR does require users to create a free account before they can find/access the tool, so I don't think many folks at St. Olaf have discovered it yet. 3) The library catalog, Catalyst, uses software from a company called Clarivate. Clarivate has launched the "Primo Research Assistant," which can be embedded into Catalyst and would not cost us anything extra. However, we have decided not to implement the Primo Research Assistant because (based on our own testing and that of librarians at other institutions) this AI tool isn't very useful or reliable yet as compared to traditional search strategies.

Q: With the use of AI comes ethical dilemmas, such as the existence of bias and environmental concerns. In your opinion, would AI's implementation in libraries outweigh these concerns?

A: I think there are a lot of nuances at play here -- it depends on what kinds of AI are being used and what purposes they're being used for. For instance, AI transcription tools can make it much faster to provide accessible audio transcripts of instructional videos for students who need them. I've used AI for this purpose myself. AI transcripts still need editing, but it saves an enormous amount of time when compared to writing the entire transcript from scratch. On the other hand, I would be extremely reluctant to give any AI tool access to patron data, such as which research materials our users are accessing or borrowing. In general, librarians take patron privacy concerns seriously, and I think it's important to (whenever possible) avoid giving that data to corporations who could misuse it.

Q: Jane Winters, a professor of Digital Humanities at the School of Advanced Study in the University of London states that "[GLAMS institutions] are responsible for high-quality data that could be used to develop large language models with transparency and fairness in mind. Without their input, decisions about AI's application in cultural heritage will be made without their valuable perspectives." To what degree do you agree with this statement?

A: I agree with both of the statements Winters makes -- that GLAMs are responsible for enormous amounts of data which c*ould* be ethically used by AI programs, and that decisions about AI's use in cultural heritage will be made with or without the input of GLAM workers, should they refuse to engage with the process. However, I don't think it necessarily follows that GLAMs have a responsibility to make all of their data accessible to AI tools. Some data, such as information about which materials are available in our collections, I generally don't have an issue with making accessible to AI tools. I can see it making our unique collections easier for people to discover when they're using AI for their own research. On the other hand, I am

opposed to making patron data available to AIs, for the reasons I mentioned in the previous question.

Q: The relationship between AI and libraries differs a bit from that with galleries, archives, and museums. Libraries exhibit the most benefit on AI, while the converse is true for the other three. To what extent do you consider libraries to be leaders and shapers of the AI world?

A: I find this an interesting question -- I don't necessarily agree that libraries exhibit more benefit from AI than galleries/archives/museums do. I would (genuinely) be really interested to hear why you think that libraries stand to benefit more! There are many librarians in my professional networks (outside of St. Olaf) who think that generative AI is 100% bad and refuse to engage with it due to various ethical concerns; for example, one librarian at another institution was asked by a faculty member to speak with their class about AI, and that librarian refused to do so.

In my opinion, the "refusing to engage with AI" approach is not a particularly helpful stance for librarians to take, even if they are personally opposed to AI. My thinking is that AI tools are here to stay, and we'd be better off having conversations about when (and how) it is or isn't appropriate to use various tools. I think this is where libraries and librarians have a chance to really shine, is by bringing nuance to broader conversations about AI. The academic discipline that instruction librarians teach is sometimes referred to as "information literacy," and information literacy is centered around six principles, which I'll list below. I think that librarians can use these principles (the "information literacy framework") to help guide conversations around AI ethics and help students engage in deeper thinking on the topic.

[Information literacy principles](#):

- Authority Is Constructed and Contextual
- Information Creation as a Process
- Information Has Value
- Research as Inquiry
- Scholarship as Conversation
- Searching as Strategic Exploration

Jane Becker Nelson

Director of Flaten Art Museum

Q: Currently, how would you say visitor interactions and experiences are at Flaten Art Museum (participatory, engaging, etc)? What improvements, if any, would you like to see?

A: Visitor interactions vary a lot – some spend seconds with an artwork, others linger and study for a long time! I believe guided tours by staff, in partnership with faculty, offer the most impactful experiences because we can tailor object-based learning to course goals. In our current exhibition, QR codes guide visitors to a variety of multimedia resources, including interviews with artists, poets, scholars. These tools provide contextual information that supports learning about the objects on view. A combo of digital tools and personalized human interaction is powerful.

Q: Have you had any experience with AI in a museum or gallery context?

A: I haven't. I've been looking at artists using AI, such as Minne Atairu, Tino Seghal, Charlie Engman. I'm interested in how artists will push the tools, but I haven't had any AI use for visitors in museums and galleries.

Q: In general, how do you feel about AI being used as a tool for museums and galleries? Examples include personalized tours, interactive guides, immersive exhibits, and accessibility opportunities.

A: At its best it presents an incredible opportunity to harness expertise and knowledge for greater accessibility, connecting diverse visitors with art and personalizing their experience. I fear that it could lead to less discovery and awe, less personal exploration, keep visitors tethered to phones and devices while they're in the gallery, and flatten experiences with art into consumption. I regularly use Claude in the workplace, so I asked Claude to weigh in. I found the answer interesting, so I'm pasting it here in blue:

> This is a fascinating question, and I appreciate you asking for my perspective as someone working in the arts.
>
> I think AI has genuine potential to democratize and deepen museum experiences, but it also raises important questions about what we value in cultural institutions.
>
> **The promising aspects:**

Accessibility stands out as perhaps the most compelling use case. AI can provide real-time audio descriptions for visually impaired visitors, translate exhibit text instantly for non-native speakers, and offer multiple reading levels for different audiences—including children or people with cognitive differences. This isn't hypothetical; it's already helping museums reach communities they've historically underserved.

Personalization also has real merit. Not everyone enters a museum with the same background knowledge or interests. An AI guide that adapts to whether you're a medieval history enthusiast or a first-time visitor, or that connects artworks to your personal experiences, can make collections feel more relevant and less intimidating. For smaller museums with limited staff, this technology could provide educational depth that wouldn't otherwise be feasible.

The concerns:

My biggest worry is the potential loss of serendipity and contemplation. Museums are among the few remaining spaces where we can slow down, sit with ambiguity, and make unexpected discoveries. If AI constantly mediates our experience—suggesting what to see next, explaining everything immediately—we might lose that productive discomfort of encountering something truly unfamiliar on our own terms.

There's also the question of interpretive authority. Human curators bring expertise, yes, but also subjectivity, debate, and evolving perspectives. An AI system, even a sophisticated one, risks flattening complex cultural conversations into seemingly definitive answers. Who decides what the AI says about contested histories or whose voices it privileges?

The economic dimension matters too. If museums become dependent on expensive AI systems, does that exacerbate inequalities between well-funded and struggling institutions? And does it divert resources from human educators, whose jobs involve not just conveying information but mentoring, inspiring, and responding to the unpredictable moments that make museum visits memorable?

My take:

I think AI works best as a complement, not a replacement—enhancing accessibility and offering optional layers of engagement while preserving space for unmediated encounters with art and artifacts. The most exciting implementations I've seen are those that use AI to handle routine questions, freeing up human staff for deeper conversations, or that make collections searchable in new ways without prescribing how visitors should experience them.

What's your instinct about this? Are there specific applications you're considering for Flaten, or concerns you're wrestling with?

Q: Have you considered using AI as a tool for Flaten? If so, what are some of the barriers you might come across in attempting to implement it?

A: I use AI in my work regularly, but not to independently support visitor experience. I feel like FAM is still a long way off from that, but who knows?

Q: With the use of AI comes ethical dilemmas, such as the existence of bias and environmental concerns. In your opinion, would AI's implementation in museums and galleries outweigh these concerns?

A: So many ethical concerns, yes. My thinking is still evolving on this topic, but as I've indicated, I'm experimenting with the tools despite the ethical conundrums and shortcomings.

Q: Jane Winters, a professor of Digital Humanities at the School of Advanced Study in the University of London states that "[GLAMS institutions] are responsible for high-quality data that could be used to develop large language models with transparency and fairness in mind. Without their input, decisions about AI's application in cultural heritage will be made without their valuable perspectives." To what degree do you agree with this statement?

A: I think the danger is greatest if cultural leaders ignore the possibilities AI can offer, and remain morally superior and/or outside the conversation. Yes, we have the expertise and responsibility. If we want our expertise to have influence we need to lean into the emerging conversations, collaborate outside our field, and assert our authority.