

2024-2025

OCUL
Ontario Council of University Libraries

Annual Report



JOSEPH S. STAUFFER LIBRARY
QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY
KINGSTON, ONTARIO

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Message from the Chair



It has been a profound privilege to serve as Chair of the Ontario Council of University Libraries (OCUL) for the 2024-25 year. As I reflect on my term, I am truly inspired by the impactful engagement of the directors and library professionals across the province who give of their time and knowledge to advance our consortial work. Their commitment to OCUL’s goals is instrumental in expanding and enhancing our shared contributions to the success of students, instructors, and researchers across Ontario’s universities.

This past year was marked by several key initiatives some of which you will read about in this annual report.

We engaged in consultative processes to develop a strategic plan that shapes OCUL’s future and sets the consortium’s priorities for the next four years. A new core principle emphasizing our commitment to Truth and Reconciliation now accompanies the strategic plan, to further ground our service development and member engagement in reciprocity and non-extractive actions.

In alignment with our exploration of AI and machine learning’s ethical, responsible use – and OCUL’s longstanding development using open systems – we also endorsed the Open Source Initiative’s definition of open-source AI. By advancing the value of openness in the AI age we can better depend on the outputs of these systems that represent themselves as valuable to the research enterprise.

The OCUL Directors met head-on the task of addressing complex financial matters, investing their attention and administrative expertise to affirm new processes and policies to guide OCUL operations and partnerships.

It is with great pleasure that I introduce this annual report that celebrates success stories from this past year, and I extend my deepest gratitude to everyone who has contributed to these collective achievements.

Thank you for your continued collaboration and innovation.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark Asberg".

Mark Asberg
Vice-Provost and Chief Librarian, Queen’s University and OCUL Chair (2024-2025)

Message from the Executive Director

In a rapidly changing academic landscape, something that remains consistent — and that continually inspires me — is our membership's collaborative spirit.

This past year at OCUL involved much foundation-building, setting an agile path for the consortium's coming years. Over a 10-month development process, I saw first-hand the energy contributed to building the new OCUL Strategic Plan and I am deeply grateful to the member library workers, community partners and past OCUL leaders who shared their experiences and insights with us. You helped chart a course for the consortium that is designed to enhance the impact and value of OCUL's collective work and the services of Scholars Portal.



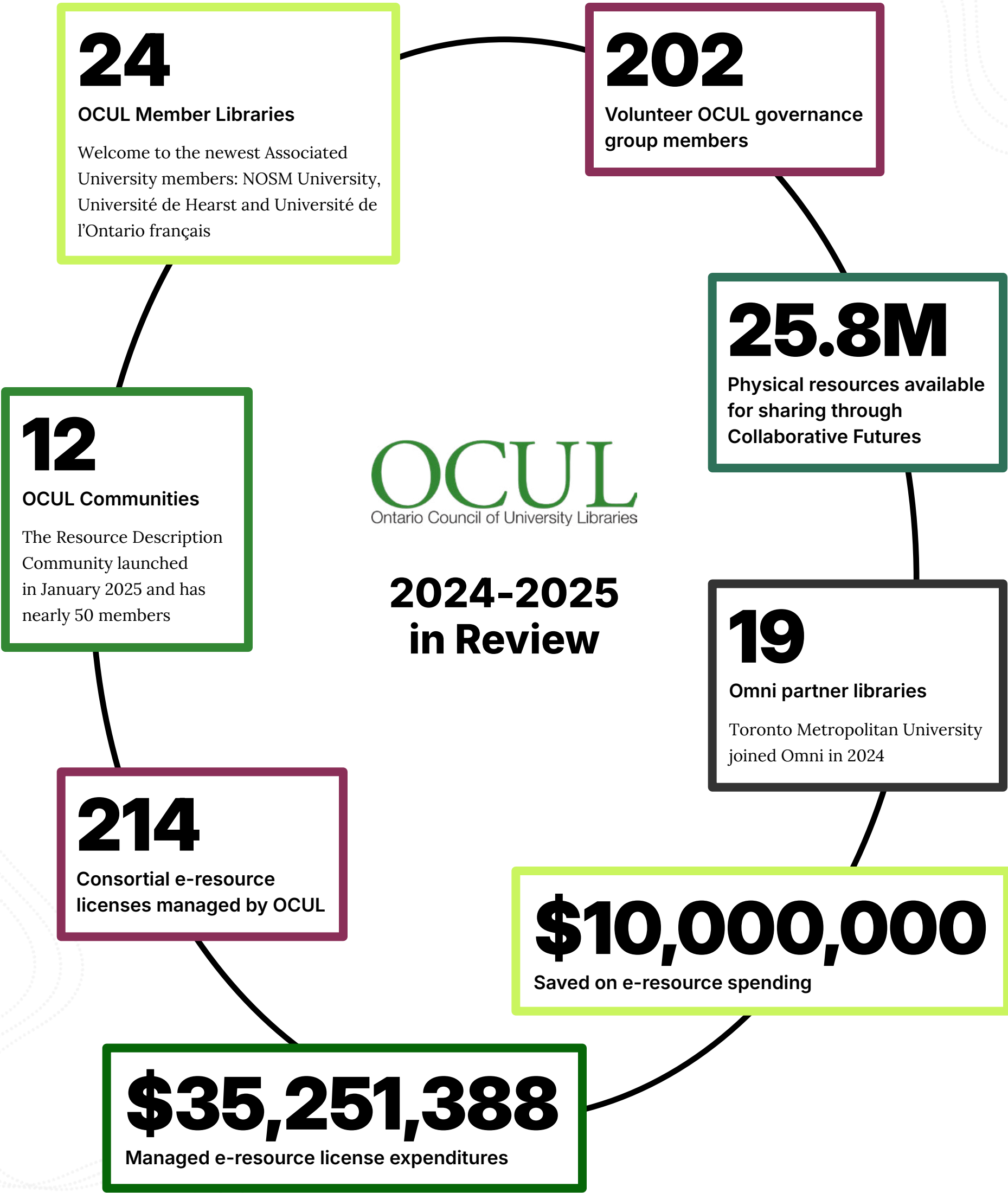
We also celebrated a significant milestone for Collaborative Futures at the end of 2024, as we marked the fifth anniversary of Omni, the academic search tool connecting 19 member libraries across the province. Be sure to check out page 8 for a fun look at Omni celebrations past and present as we commemorate this momentous year.

Thank you to the OCUL Directors and our many governance groups for their oversight and guidance. You ensure that our services and programming continue to meet the needs of member libraries and academic communities. I also want to thank our staff for their dedication and hard work. Your efforts are instrumental in driving OCUL's priorities forward. Together, you all exemplify a commitment to shared governance, collective infrastructure and cross-institution technology that can evolve to achieve what no single university library can on its own.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Amy Greenberg". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Amy Greenberg

OCUL Executive Director



A Framework for Consortial Open Access

In 2023, under the guidance of the OCUL Information Resources Committee, the Open Access Working Group began exploring ways to approach open access across the consortium.

This foundational work came to fruition over the past year with two published resources that directly address open access at OCUL. The first, a Statement on Open Access Principles, provides a philosophical framework that helps guide OCUL's services and infrastructures in the open sharing and preservation of scholarly research. The statement also pledges to work with member libraries to achieve sustainable, accessible and equitable open access publishing practices.

The second resource, the Open Access Evaluation Criteria, equips member libraries with a practical, adaptable tool to consistently and effectively

assess licensing agreements that incorporate open access elements. Included are a matrix with guiding principles, specific criteria and evaluative questions to aid in assessing open access offers at an institutional level.

Both [resources are available on the OCUL website](#) and represent a pivotal moment in the consortium's ongoing commitment to advancing open access to scholarship.

OPEN ACCESS WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

Emily Carlisle, Western University (co-chair)

Roger Reka, University of Windsor (co-chair)

Denise Smith, Brock University

Paul St. Pierre, University of Guelph

Mark Swartz, Queen's University

Through an agreement with Company of Biologists, participating OCUL member library institutions benefit from uncapped, immediate and fee-free publishing of accepted Open Access research articles in five transformative journals.

In 2024, twelve scientific articles were published by researchers from five of the participating institutions: Carleton University, University of Guelph, University of Ottawa, University of Toronto and Western University.

The Power of Consortial Licensing: A Case Study in Value

Amid a post-secondary landscape that increasingly seeks financial efficiencies and savings, the true value of OCUL’s consortial licensing program has never been more evident. While member libraries navigate the effects of various fiscal constraints, a significant economic challenge directly affecting collections this past year was the fluctuating Canadian dollar. With the US dollar exchange rate curtailing library purchasing power by nearly 30 per cent, OCUL’s collective negotiation efforts became an essential safeguard for institutional budgets. This was especially true during the extensive renewal negotiations with SciFinder, a scientific information resource for Ontario university researchers, students and faculty.

Months-long talks with the publisher were informed by direct, data-driven feedback from OCUL member libraries and findings from a Collection Assessment & Evaluation Subcommittee survey, along with institutional comments, provided a clear basis for pricing negotiations.

The successful conclusion of the SciFinder negotiation resulted in significant cost savings for all participating libraries, serving as a powerful example of the impact of OCUL’s consortial approach. By leveraging the collective voice and buying power of its members, OCUL achieved an outcome that would have been out of reach for individual institutions and ensures continued access to a vital research information source.

The development of an OCUL-wide collective collecting strategy is a key piece of the consortium’s new strategic plan that launched in 2025.

Underpinning this priority is the extensive research conducted throughout 2024 by the OCUL-IR Collective Collecting Working Group.

The group’s review of the state of consortial approaches to collaborative collecting and results from a member survey provide a backbone for the forthcoming work to define collective collecting for OCUL and set a strategy for collaborative collection development in print and digital content.

COLLECTIVE COLLECTING WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

- Alicia Zorzetto, Brock University (chair)
- Janice Adlington, McMaster University
- Eva Jurczyk, University of Toronto
- Chelsie Lalonde, Ontario Tech University
- Harriet Rykse, Western University
- Lisl Schoner-Saunders, Algoma University
- Christa Foley, OCUL

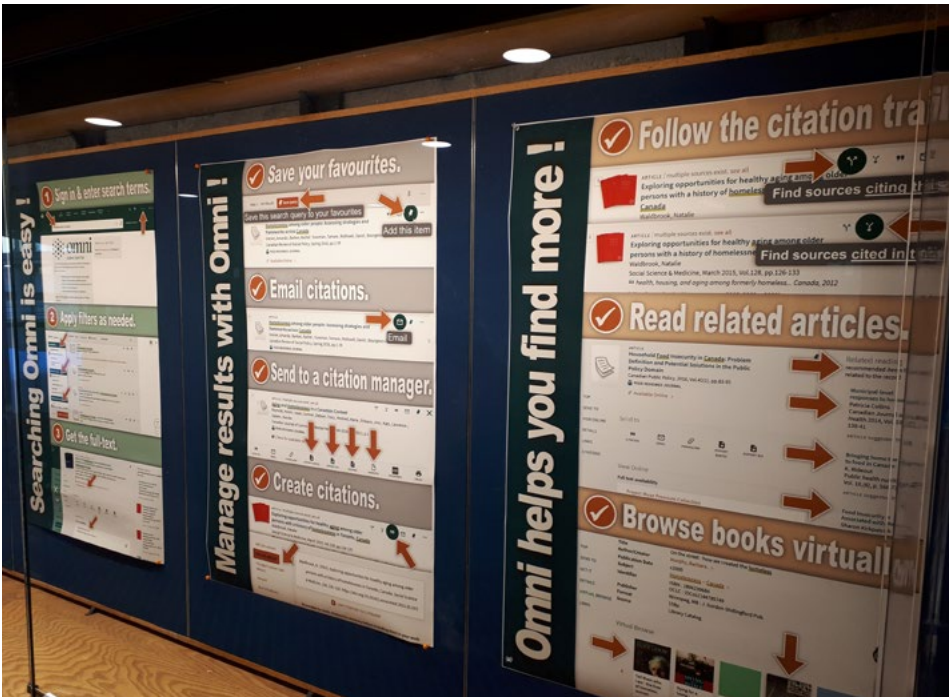
A Legacy of Collaboration

**Five Years, 19 Universities, 25.8 Million Resources,
One Shared Library System.**

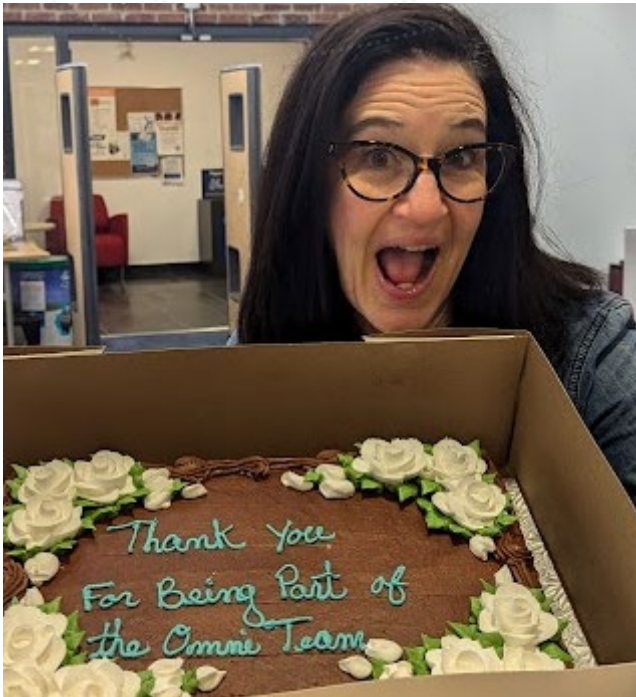
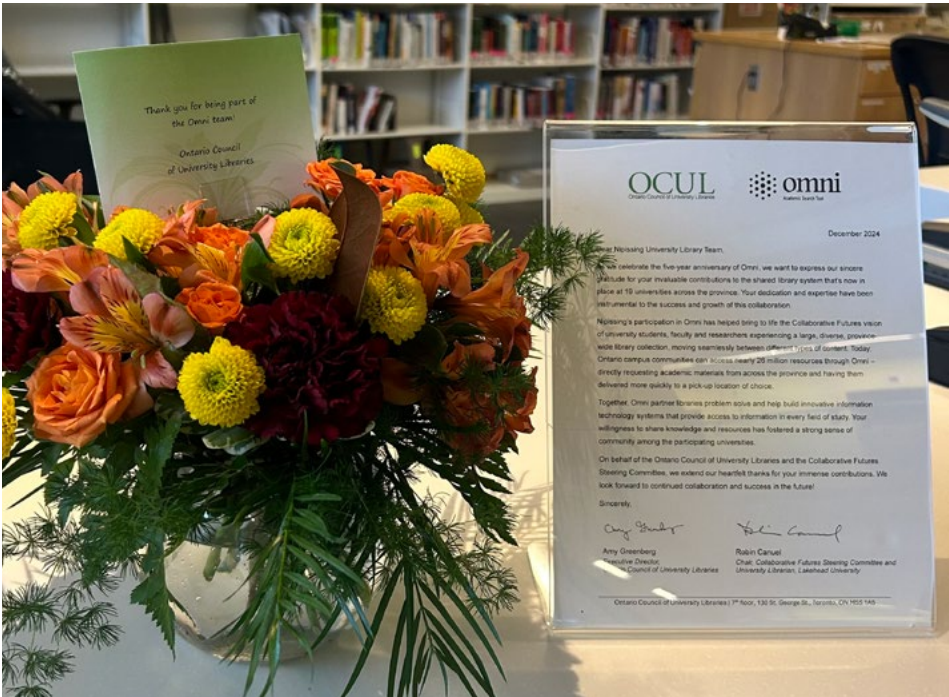
In 2019, OCUL embarked on a transformative journey with the launch of Omni, the academic search tool connecting member libraries across Ontario. This past year marked the five-year anniversary of this technology innovation that brings to life the [Collaborative Futures vision](#) of university students, faculty and researchers seamlessly accessing a large and diverse province-wide library collection. Omni also went live at Toronto Metropolitan University in 2024, bringing the number of participating member libraries to nineteen.



A display at Lakehead University announcing the launch of Omni



Clockwise, from top left: Trent University's poster display about Omni features; a celebratory cake; Ontario Tech University's Omni launch celebration; Trent University's library team on Omni launch day; Wilfrid Laurier University library team members cutting a celebratory cake.



Clockwise, from top left: Five-year Omni anniversary recognition at Nipissing University; Omni anniversary cake at Ontario Tech University; library team members at Toronto Metropolitan University celebrating their campus launch of Omni.

Omni’s success is measured in its positive impact on the province’s academic communities. Since its launch, the shared collection has expanded to nearly 26 million resources requestable through Omni. This growth, coupled with ongoing cleanup of bibliographic records, ensures that users can find and access a more accurate and comprehensive representation of the materials available through the search tool. Notably, over 1.55 million physical item requests have been fulfilled through the shared network, providing fast, easy access to materials across Ontario campuses.

The accomplishments of the past five years are a testament to the dedication of the library teams who make Omni a reality. Their commitment to building a shared system, aligning policies, and developing common workflows has laid a strong foundation for future innovation. As OCUL looks ahead, this legacy of collaboration will continue to build, ensuring that Omni remains a valuable library tool that supports and advances the academic goals of Ontario’s universities for years to come.



Capacity Building for Service Sustainability

Working in a complex consortial technology system that spans 19 member libraries means there is continual need for guidance and orientation to the various workflows and processes that sustain the Omni academic search tool and its supporting infrastructure.

Starting in the summer of 2024, a small working group including three librarians from the OCUL membership undertook the significant project of developing an onboarding and training plan and toolkit to support those working in Omni at their home institutions.

The group’s environmental scan of peer consortia and institutions, plus a needs assessment conducted via nine focus groups and an online survey, identified a variety of resources and preferred formats that form a soon-to-be proposed onboarding and training program, with development of materials and content anticipated throughout 2025 and 2026.

COLLABORATIVE FUTURES ONBOARDING AND TRAINING WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

Courtney Bremer, University of Waterloo

Kailey Fallis, University of Guelph

Lisl Schoner-Saunders, Algoma University

Anika Ervin-Ward, OCUL

Alex Fletcher, OCUL

Making Discovery Easier for All Library Users

Ease of use and ready access to research materials is core to the Omni academic search tool functionality, echoing OCUL's commitment to building and delivering services that support inclusive experiences for people accessing library resources. But what happens when an Omni usability issue is identified? And, perhaps even more importantly, how does it get resolved and make the search tool better?

Ex Libris is the software provider for the technology infrastructure on which Omni is built. Fundamental to this vendor-consortium relationship is the ability to report issues to Ex Libris – whether identified as a local or an OCUL-wide case – and have those investigated for solutions.

All Omni partner libraries participate in identifying and bringing issues to Ex Libris, demonstrating the detailed attention paid to the functionality of the infrastructure that underpins Omni, not only for end users but also the library teams that power the system. In the past year, every Omni partner library opened cases ranging from accessibility issues in the user interface to missing keywords in requested search results.

Together, these collective efforts contribute to making Omni a more effective and inclusive search tool that supports academic scholarship.

In April 2025, more than 160 participants from around the world were brought together to learn about the importance of user testimonies in building and providing tech-based library services.

The newest subcommittee under Collaborative Futures champions proactively identifying and removing barriers within Omni and its shared network that disadvantage individuals with disabilities.

As part of the Collaborative Futures Accessibility Subcommittee's efforts this past year, the group brought together academic library workers from around the world who use Ex Libris software to

learn about the importance of user testimonies in building and providing tech-based library services.

More than 160 people joined this online event, engaging in a guided discussion about how attendees are aiming to improve the accessibility of their library software and sharing how the experiences of disability communities inform their technology development.

A Collective Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation

A set of core principles (right) guide OCUL's actions and are woven through the consortium's services and initiatives. These express how OCUL is meant to advance academic teaching, research and learning, develop robust infrastructure, and demonstrate value. The principles also reflect a commitment to nurturing social change and inclusivity.

As part of the strategic planning process in 2024-2025, the OCUL Council established a sixth principle to clearly state a consortium-wide responsibility to reconciliation with Indigenous communities — one that centres reciprocity and relationship-building to acknowledge and address harms inflicted through historic and ongoing colonialism.

ADVANCING RECONCILIATION WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

OCUL is committed to reciprocal, non-extractive relationship building and constructive action that centres reconciliation with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.

We aspire to transform library practices and experiences by being active in the work of truth and reconciliation.

OCUL Core Principles

ADVANCING RESEARCH

OCUL expands the breadth and depth of research resources and services available to member institutions. We seek out innovative strategies for preserving and curating research resources. We advance open access to scholarship.

ADVANCING TEACHING AND LEARNING

OCUL develops and delivers robust, user-centred and sustainable services to support the academic success of students and faculty at Ontario universities. By working together, we build capacity across member institutions.

ADVANCING ACADEMIC LIBRARIES AS LEADERS IN SOCIAL CHANGE AND INCLUSIVITY

OCUL is dedicated to diversity and inclusion and values different ways of knowing. We respectfully build and deliver services, resources, spaces and research that support these intentions.

DEVELOPING AND SUPPORTING ROBUST INFRASTRUCTURE

OCUL enhances the technological infrastructure and staff expertise required to support the evolution of teaching, research, and learning.

DEMONSTRATING VALUE

OCUL advances the efforts of Ontario's academic libraries to transform scholarship and revolutionize the delivery of library services and resources by modeling both an evidence-based approach to its practices and a strong focus on communicating value.

Refining Reporting with Data-Driven Dashboards

Behind the seamless resource sharing across OCUL's member libraries and partners is a complex technological infrastructure, rich with data. But how does that data get into the hands of the library teams who need it most? Three new analytics dashboards provide an answer.

This past spring, the Collaborative Futures Resource Sharing Analytics Working Group released a suite of dashboards to OCUL member libraries. Danielle Farr (University of Waterloo), Crystal Mills (McMaster University), and Kim Vallee (Lakehead University) led the creation of these tools that each mark a significant step in leveraging data to improve library services and collections management.

The Resource Sharing Request Error Report Dashboard captures common errors that can occur during resource sharing and with local requests. Danielle, who headed up the development of this customizable dashboard, noted that while many automations exist, the complexity of the system can still allow problem requests to slip through the cracks. Previously, staff would have had to wait until the request passed through the full rota, or for the requestor to reach out and inquire about their request before problems rose to the surface. But, as Danielle explains, "The new dashboard helps library staff quickly identify requests that may have otherwise been overlooked, allowing teams to resolve issues proactively, ultimately saving both time and resources – and we offer a better service to our campus communities."

For Crystal, who spearheaded the AFN Common Questions Dashboard, this analytical tool is a chance for libraries to understand the volume, impact and performance of their interlibrary loans, like average

transit times to ship materials and local pick-up rates. "I think of the common questions dashboard as a 'gut check' for library staff. In some cases, the numbers will confirm beliefs about a service and in others, it may dispel a myth or an anxiety around the shared system." Because library teams spend more time on problematic requests, the dashboard provides the perspective that issues are often a small percentage of the full scope of resource-sharing activity and allows staff to determine the value in changing existing workflows or processes.

The third tool, the Resource Sharing Collection Development Dashboard, was developed by Kim and displays the most popular titles and subjects being requested through interlibrary loan, helping teams identify collection gaps and make informed acquisition decisions. The new dashboard consolidates requests that were previously separated into individual reports and provides more information about the type of request, streamlining how and where library workers source data. "This dashboard is really flexible, with its filters and sortable columns, and we hope it encourages library teams to get curious about and creative with the data," she adds. "Plus, it can be used on the fly – not just once a year – to investigate spikes in demand for particular titles, which could allow for faster response to changing needs."

Together, the three dashboards provide access to essential data, enabling more informed decision-making and improving efficiency while reflecting the OCUL commitment to enhancing technological infrastructure and library staff expertise to support teaching, research and learning.

Community-Driven Redevelopment: Revitalizing the Scholars GeoPortal

What began nearly 20 years ago with the idea of creating an Ontario-wide spatial data portal for researchers and libraries, has evolved into the robust Scholars GeoPortal of today. This collaborative digital research infrastructure provides access to more than 5,000 large-scale geospatial datasets and over 3 million Ontario aerial images and map collections — none of which would have been possible without the shared expertise and efforts of OCUL Geo Community members.

After a comprehensive scoping and requirements process to gather feedback from across the OCUL membership, starting in 2024, a redevelopment project got underway to design a modernized and renewed infrastructure. Envisioned is a new geospatial catalogue and improvements to existing GeoPortal features to more readily find and map data.

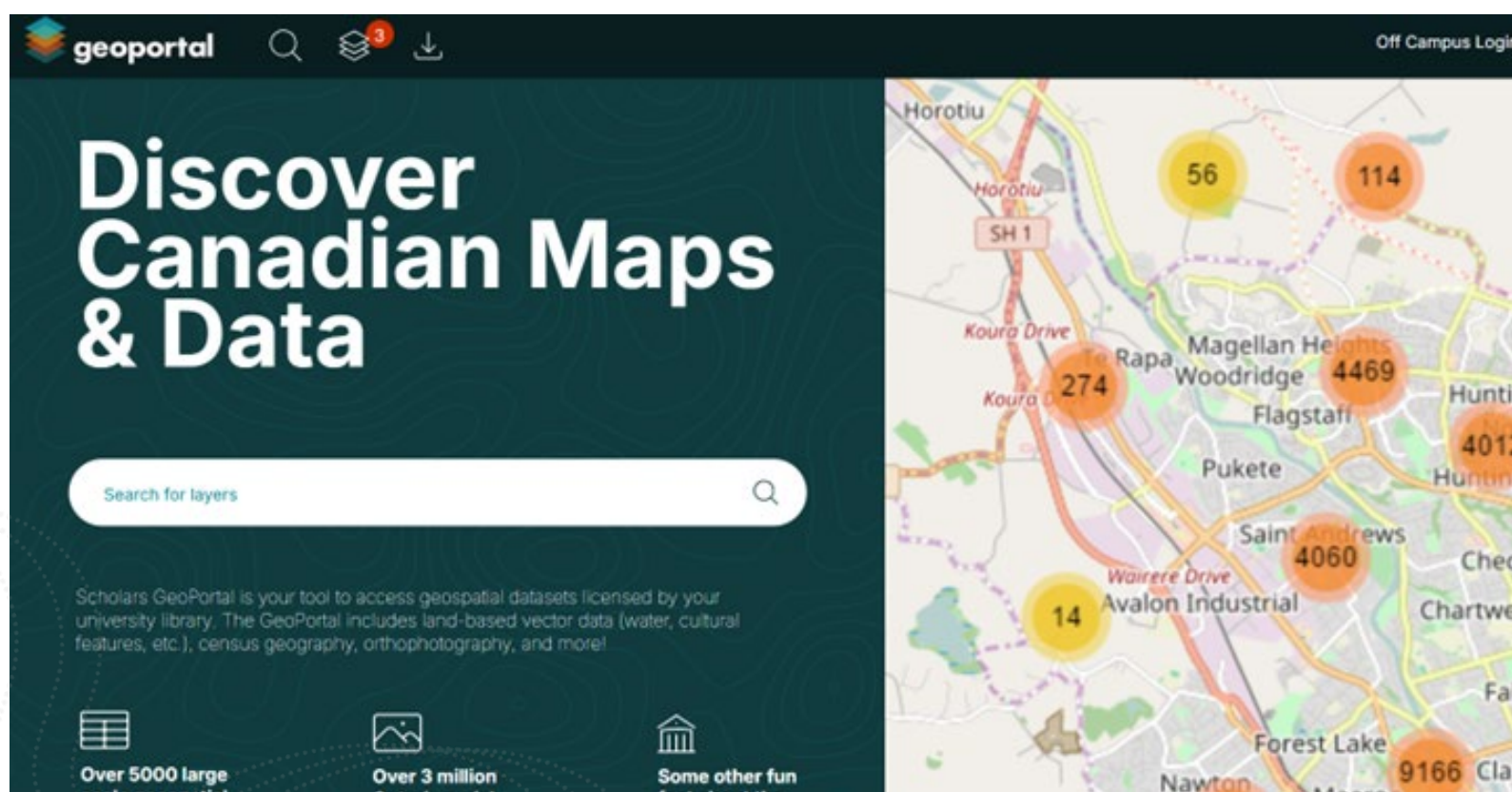
Supporting the redevelopment is a working group comprising staff from Scholars Portal alongside expert librarians and technical staff at member libraries, some of whom have been connected to the GeoPortal since its initial days. For Alicia Urquidí Díaz, Scholars Portal Metadata & Data Services

Librarian and project lead, experiencing first-hand the collaborative nature of the working group has been inspiring. “Having members from the OCUL Geo Community that are so deeply invested in the GeoPortal is a really strong foundation for developing a tool connected with its end users,” she explains. “Many of the librarians have been part of the GeoPortal’s development for over a decade, so there’s a special continuity of ethos that comes with such a tight-knit group.”

By living within what Alicia calls “a network of expertise,” the working group brings together proficiency and perspective from map and data collections and geographic information systems that are valuable when planning, troubleshooting and making technical decisions.

As the redevelopment project looks ahead to its beta phase of testing next spring, OCUL member libraries can expect expanded data coverage, enhanced metadata, and improved data discovery in the GeoPortal in 2026. Visit [SPOTDocs](#) for redevelopment updates and working group membership.

A wireframe of
the redeveloped
Scholars GeoPortal



The Evolution of Academic Libraries and AI Experimentation

OCUL launched the initial phase of its AI and machine learning (AIML) exploration in the summer of 2024 to promote the responsible, ethical use of AIML in the academic library environment while building AI knowledge across the consortium membership and beyond.

Starting with a series of pilot projects to test and assess tools and techniques that can be adapted for iterative use, this initiative actively fosters the staff skills and understanding necessary for a future where AI augments the human expertise at the heart of library teams.

A key development in these early stages was the strategic expansion of staffing. The addition of Program Manager Dr. Kari D. Weaver and AI Special Projects Developer Furquan Hassan strengthened OCUL's capacity, enabling better support for the pilot projects and alignment with long-term goals. Having a robust team in place led to a decision to extend the initial exploration's timeline to 2027, ensuring ample time to achieve its objectives.

Alongside the work to get pilot projects underway, a significant milestone was also reached when OCUL was awarded a grant from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. This funding supports the project examining how generative AI and optical character recognition technologies can improve the discoverability and metadata quality of 50,000 historical Canadian government documents digitized at the University of Toronto Libraries and made openly available on the Internet Archive.

OCUL's exploration of AIML technologies is deeply rooted in its engagement with the consortium's membership. A program survey in May 2025 gathered valuable insights into the needs and perspectives of library workers across Ontario's universities. The survey results will inform the AI-related professional development programming hosted by OCUL to support library workers' learning and upskilling.

As the AIML initiative continues to gain momentum, its progress positions OCUL as a collaborative thought leader that scaffolds the evolution of libraries' academic and research services.



Dr. Kari D. Weaver



Furquan Hassan

Celebrating Outstanding Member Contributions

Each year, library workers and teams from the OCUL membership are celebrated for their exceptional contributions that advance the consortium's mission and priorities.

Matt Van Ast from the University of Guelph was the recipient of the 2024 OCUL Outstanding Contribution Award, honouring his unwavering commitment to the Collaborative Futures vision. Matt has been a vital part of several Collaborative Futures groups, in addition to the time he gives to help with testing, analysis and problem solving for the OCUL resource sharing system and the Automated Fulfillment Network (AFN).

Matt has been instrumental in the development of the network since its inception, having previously served as a member of both the AFN Pilot Team and AFN Expansion Working Group. His most recent significant contribution was what has been called a “herculean effort” in customizing letters used by the resource sharing system. Each letter must be manually activated and Matt hand-coded nearly 30 different letters for all 19 partner libraries, a process that had to account for both English and French languages as well as ensure the correct pickup information displayed. This painstaking work, a task that has been ongoing as the system evolves, has been described by one of Matt's nominators as essential to the successful operation of resource sharing at OCUL.

Thank you, Matt, for your dedication to the advancement and delivery of innovative library services. You have created a lasting consortial impact for years to come.

A Strategic Plan to Enhance Innovative, Collaborative Library Services

While each OCUL member library has its own strategic goals, coming together as a consortium to broadly transform the delivery of library services and resources presents a unique prioritization and planning opportunity.

Over the course of 2024, OCUL sought extensive input to shape its next strategic plan. A committee helped ensure the process incorporated voices from across the consortium, with OCUL Committee and Community leadership, library directors, external partners and staff sharing their experiences and ideas through surveys, interviews and facilitated listening sessions.

This collective wisdom directly informed the new 2025-2029 OCUL Strategic Plan, which focuses on priorities identified by the membership. “This plan is a shared vision that embodies the collaboration at the core of OCUL,” explains OCUL Executive Director, Amy Greenberg. “The plan was forged by the expertise and active participation of our members, and I especially extend gratitude to the strategic planning committee that helped bring it all together.”

OCUL STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Kieren Bailey, OCAD University

Julie Hannaford, University of Toronto

Liz Hayden, University of Ottawa

Nicole Nolan, Brock University

Sarah Simpkin, Carleton University

Samantha Vettraino, Western University

Jacqueline Whyte Appleby, Scholars Portal

Amy Greenberg, OCUL

Discover the [2025-2029 OCUL Strategic Plan](#).

Thought Leadership in Action

OCUL staff, alongside member library experts and consortium partners, presented at a range of conferences and events in 2024-2025.

Select highlights include:

CANADIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE (July 2024)

“Academic Libraries and Machine Learning: Strategy, Projects, and Capacity Building”
Catherine Steeves, OCUL

FUTURE OF ARCHIVES AND LIBRARIES: HOW TECHNOLOGY AND AI ARE (RE)SHAPING HERITAGE INSTITUTIONS SYMPOSIUM — PANEL (September 2024)

Amy Greenberg, OCUL
Sonia Bonspille Boileau, “William” Augmented Reality Project
Andrew Chernevych, Galt Museum & Archives
Lisa Mullins, Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada
Mathieu Sabourin, Library and Archives Canada
Avery Swartz, Camp Tech

ACCESS CONFERENCE — PANEL (October 2024)

“Cracks in the Canadian Resource Sharing Landscape”
Alex Fletcher, OCUL
Sabina Pagotto, Scholars Portal
Maryvon Côté, McGill University
CJ de Jong, University of Alberta
Harjinder Rana, University of Toronto
Rebecca Smith, Memorial University of Newfoundland
Joseph Wickens, Dalhousie University

TRENT UNIVERSITY’S AI HOPES AND FEARS DISCUSSION SERIES (December 2024)

“AI in the Library”
Amy Greenberg, OCUL
Catherine Steeves, OCUL
Emily Tufts, Trent University

ONTARIO LIBRARY ASSOCIATION SUPER CONFERENCE (February 2025)

“Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for Academic Libraries: A Collaborative Strategy to Enhance and Build Capacity”
Amy Greenberg, OCUL
Catherine Steeves, OCUL

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