

OCUL Ontario Council of
University Libraries

Annual Report

2025-2026

Immersion Studio at Toronto Metropolitan University Library



Toronto Metropolitan University Library

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Message from the Chair



It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Ontario Council of University Libraries (OCUL) annual report for 2025-2026.

As I reflect on this past year, I am struck by the enduring value of collaboration. OCUL's progress continues because of the dedication of member library leaders and teams, the consortium's governance groups, our Scholars Portal colleagues, and the OCUL office staff. Together, we advance shared goals, respond to evolving challenges, and demonstrate what can be achieved through collective action.

In my time as OCUL Chair, two themes featured prominently in our consortial priorities: collective collecting and artificial intelligence and machine learning. While these areas are complex, the willingness to engage in their related work reflects our commitment to exploring new ways to support the academic environment.

Building on conversations from a collective collecting colloquium that took place in September 2025, OCUL directors, staff, and working group members have led thoughtful discussions about how we can develop a shared vision for collection management. Now, two project-based groups are moving forward those discussions into feasibility and implementation planning that will help guide our next steps.

Artificial intelligence and machine learning have likewise emerged as significant areas of activity and opportunity for OCUL. Through our AI and Machine Learning Initiative, pilot projects have made headway and, in some cases, moved to completion, helping us better understand where these technologies can have positive impact on library workflows and services, mindful of the need for human oversight and direction. At the same time, sector partners have reinforced the important role that libraries have in AI-ready infrastructure, trusted scholarly knowledge, and AI literacy. The projects underway today will shape how OCUL continues to lead in this rapidly changing space.

It has been a privilege to serve as OCUL Chair, and I am deeply grateful for the collegiality, expertise, and innovation that members bring to our shared work. As you read this report, I hope you will see not only the accomplishments of the past year, but also the strong foundation we are setting for the future.

Mark Robertson

Dean of Libraries, Toronto Metropolitan University and OCUL Chair (2025-2026)

Message from the Executive Director

When I look back on the past year's OCUL activities, it is remarkable to see how all the work set in motion in 2025 and early 2026 highlights the consortium's adaptability and resilience – a throughline of which is the power of working together.

From advancing conversations and planning around collective collecting, to establishing quality standards to improve uploads to the Accessible Content ePortal, OCUL member libraries have continued to demonstrate a strong commitment to building sustainable, collaborative approaches that benefit the entire consortium.

Through our AI and Machine Learning Initiative, we created shared opportunities for learning, experimentation, and practical service development that will support Ontario universities as they adapt to an AI-enabled world. At the same time, our Collaborative Futures initiative is preparing for a new province-wide Omni interface, with emphasis on accessibility and user experience. These efforts reflect our belief that shared technologies should enhance academic library services while staying grounded in the needs of campus communities.

Looking to the future, OCUL will commemorate its 60th year in 2027 – a testament to the adaptability and resilience mentioned at the start of this welcome message. Since the consortium's founding in 1967, the enduring value of collaboration among academic libraries has been clear. From early innovations in inter-university borrowing to the development of shared infrastructure, OCUL's history reflects a commitment to achieving more together than libraries could accomplish individually. As we approach this anniversary, we do so with admiration in what prior generations of library leaders and teams have built, and with confidence that the same spirit of mutual support will keep guiding our work in the years ahead.

I extend my sincere thanks to our member libraries, governance volunteers, partners, and dedicated OCUL and Scholars Portal staff. The accomplishments highlighted in this report are the result of your expertise, generosity, and shared vision.

Amy Greenberg

OCUL Executive Director



Consortial Impact By the Numbers



300+ library staff hours saved

More than 300 hours of member library staff time were saved by OCUL’s automated interlibrary loan request form, freeing up local capacity to support resource-sharing workflows.



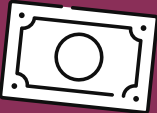
215 licenses managed

OCUL managed 215 e-resource licenses on behalf of member libraries, helping extend library budgets and expand the breadth of scholarly content available to students, faculty, and researchers.



26 million physical items

University campuses across Ontario can access a collection of nearly 26 million high-quality academic resources for research, teaching, and learning through OCUL’s Collaborative Futures initiative.



\$10 million in savings

Through OCUL and Scholars Portal, Ontario universities collectively saved over \$10 million in library service and resource costs.



3% license renewal increase

OCUL negotiated an average three per cent renewal rate, below projected increases, to support budget stability and cost-effective licensing for member libraries.

From Strategy to Action: Strategic Plan Progress

At OCUL, a framework of four overarching priorities and a set of strategies underpin consortial activities. The following are key accomplishments from 2025-2026 aligned with each priority in the [OCUL Strategic Plan](#).

Priority: Foster collaboration in collection management

Building on exploratory work and previously identified priority areas, in fall 2025, an online colloquium brought together 72 participants from across 22 member libraries to establish a shared definition of collective collecting. Following that event, a proposal was approved by OCUL Council for the formation of two working groups to map and scope the feasibility of AI-ready consortial content licensing and shared print collection preservation – all in support of establishing a comprehensive framework for the consortium’s collective collecting.

Priority: Leverage technology for library innovation

An agreement with Coalition Publica (the Public Knowledge Project and Érudit) on sustainable scholarly infrastructure further strengthens OCUL’s digital service arm, Scholars Portal, as a sought-after technology partner in national initiatives. By formalizing longstanding collaboration and expertise between the organizations, Scholars Portal reinforces its role as a trusted provider of digital research infrastructure within Canada’s academic libraries and the global research community.

Priority: Strengthen governance, adaptability, and organizational resilience

Key to amplifying the value of OCUL is sharing the story of consortium expertise, services, and programming. Over the past year, library and higher education groups shared OCUL news more than 30 times and a partnership with Choice, a publishing unit of the Association of College and Research Libraries, directed nearly 7,000 views to OCUL’s AI Tools for Academic Libraries blog series. By growing the consortium’s visibility, sectoral relationships are made stronger and support a more resilient foundation for future collaborations.

Priority: Cultivate member engagement and enhance member capacity

The new Acquisitions and E-Resource Management Community launched in fall 2025, bringing together more than 50 experts from member libraries to share knowledge on topics including vendor integrations, inventory management workflows, and local license management. By drawing from and building upon the deep expertise across OCUL members, the community helps cultivate best practices for long-term sustainability of workflows in networked and institutional environments.

Empowering Scholarship, Delivering Value

Member libraries participating in OCUL consortial licensing cumulatively saved more than \$9.6 million in 2025-2026.

Through centrally managed licensing and vendor negotiations, OCUL members benefit from the lowest pricing possible on e-resources and campuses have access to a wider range of scholarly content.

Tailored Collections, One License

OCUL negotiated a new license for JSTOR’s Publisher Collections, giving member libraries options to acquire specific publisher e-book collections to meet the research and learning needs of their campus communities.

Sharing Expert Knowledge for Pricing Transparency

Collaboration is at the core of OCUL. By helping develop a fair pricing model with Canadian CourseReadings, the consortium provided the publisher with a framework that can be reused in negotiations with similar library groups, leading to more equitable and consistent pricing that benefits the broader academic community.

Preserving Access through Consortial Vendor Negotiations

AI use clauses in licensing bring an added layer of complexity to e-resource vendor negotiations. OCUL successfully secured a consortial agreement with Reaxys (Elsevier) underpinned by AI use rights that preserve campuses’ equitable access to information and support institutions’ non-commercial research, teaching, and learning endeavours.

Leveraging Collective Purchasing

By leveraging collective purchasing power, OCUL helps member libraries build robust collections. On average, OCUL member libraries subscribe to:

- 29 consortial licenses at small universities
- 86 consortial licenses at medium-sized universities
- 106 consortial licenses at large universities

Building AI Readiness Across Ontario Academic Libraries

When OCUL first launched its [AI and Machine Learning Initiative](#), it was in part through a lens of supporting library workers' skills and confidence to engage with these technologies responsibly and effectively. A key component of the multi-year initiative is its capacity building program that focuses on fostering dialogue and developing and sharing practical expertise across member libraries.

Three streams of programming launched in 2025 to offer low-barrier learning opportunities: a bimonthly reading club, an event series showcasing libraries' locally developed AI training and tools, and the AI Tools for Academic Libraries blog partnership on [LibTech Insights](#). Together, these created spaces to explore emerging technologies, discuss ethical considerations around AI, and discover real-world use cases from library peers.

- **AI Exchange: 2 online events; 146 participants**
- **Beyond the Algorithm Reading Club: 5 installments; 10 online discussions with 137 participants; 84 watch hours of expert interviews**
- **AI Tools for Academic Libraries Blog: 5 posts; 7,000 page views; 284 shares**

The capacity building program reflects OCUL's commitment to helping member libraries explore, assess, and responsibly integrate AI tools for their institutional contexts. By strengthening these capabilities, libraries bolster their unique role at the intersection of digital research infrastructure, information literacy, and knowledge stewardship so universities can continue adapt to an increasingly AI-enabled world.

The four pilot projects under the AI and Machine Learning Initiative have helped OCUL and Scholars Portal better understand:

- How to generate faster, higher quality transcription and optical character recognition to directly support accessibility, research, and discoverability.
- How to build evaluative tools and processes to assess precision, quality, and usefulness of AI outputs within academic library workflows.
- How to compare different models and prompting techniques to identify fit for purpose and enable model fine tuning.

Lessons learned through the initiative continue to highlight the intrinsic need for human quality assurance, while adequate hardware investment, iterative parameter tuning, and clear documentation are critical to achieving project outcomes at scale.

Towards Reconciliation: Starting with Truths

OCUL Truth and Reconciliation Committee

Laura Banfield,
McMaster University
(Chair)

Tracy Spurway,
Algoma University

Jennifer Thiessen,
Brock University

Catherine Davidson,
Ontario Tech
University

Michelle Brown,
University of Ottawa

Sarah Toomey, Royal
Military College of
Canada

Jennifer Soutter,
University of Windsor

The [Learning Together: Reflections on the Academy and Reconciliation](#) speaker series was developed by the OCUL Truth and Reconciliation Committee to provide a shared learning opportunity for the consortium. Core to the series was the simple but important premise that reconciliation begins with truth. By bringing together Indigenous scholars and librarians to share their knowledge and lived experiences, the series created space to engage with the realities of historical and ongoing injustices.

For the committee, the series was intentional in its planning with speakers. “We know that too often Indigenous people are asked to provide ‘answers’ or shoulder the responsibility of reconciliation,” explains committee chair Laura Banfield. “Centring Indigenous voices is essential but needs to happen from a non-extractive perspective.” This lens informed how the committee worked closely with speakers, who were free to shape their presentations and determine the messages they wished to share.

Across the series’ three initial talks, 275 participants were encouraged to grapple with both broad and practical questions. Speakers asked how decolonization and Indigenization could look in practice, from library

spaces and collections to policies and everyday work. One of the most powerful messages came from speaker Dr. Kevin Lamoureux, who described libraries as “knowledge lodges.” The phrase invites an imagining of the role of academic libraries and archives as places where truths can be preserved and shared, where relationships can be nurtured, and where reconciliation can grow. This vision carries both an opportunity and a responsibility, asking how libraries can translate their commitments to reconciliation into sustained, respectful action.

The Learning Together speaker series reinforced that reconciliation is not a destination but an ongoing process of listening, learning, and relationship building that starts with acknowledging hard truths. By centring Indigenous voices and creating space for honest conversations, the series helped advance OCUL’s commitment to reconciliation while challenging the academic library community to reflect on its own role in that work. As knowledge institutions, libraries have a unique responsibility to preserve and make accessible the truths that inform understanding. In doing so, they can help create the conditions for meaningful change across Ontario universities and beyond.

The Learning Together speaker series launched in 2025 with support from the OCUL New Initiatives Fund. Three online events brought together the OCUL community to hear from Dr. Sheila Cote-Meek, Dr. Kevin Lamoureux, and Lorisia MacLeod as they shared perspectives on Indigenous voices in the academy, school as a place of healing, and librarianship through an Indigenous lens. We are deeply grateful to each speaker for generously giving of their time and knowledge.

Raising the Bar for Accessible Content

For more than a decade, the [Accessible Content ePortal](#) (ACE) has helped OCUL member libraries share digitized materials in a variety of alternate formats, making it easier for institutions to support students and researchers who require accessible content. Since 2020, a community submission form has been the entry point for libraries to add their locally scanned materials to ACE.

With the addition of the community form, ensuring submitted ACE content meets standards for quality, accessibility, and copyright compliance became increasingly important. A recent assessment found thousands of records were missing key metadata like publication dates and copyright information, while the quality of uploaded scans varied widely. Without common standards, libraries and ACE users could encounter everything from clean, searchable documents to scans with missing pages, skewed text, or incomplete accessibility features.

To explore solutions for these inconsistencies, a task group comprising OCUL member libraries and Scholars Portal staff surveyed schools' ACE coordinators to understand their existing workflows and technical capacities. From that research, the group developed a practical, community-informed framework that balances quality with feasibility.

At the heart of the framework is a new set of digitization standards organized into three quality levels. The standards were intentionally designed around what libraries can realistically achieve while providing tiered benchmarks for accessibility. As task group lead, Carli Agostino, explains, "We know the teams who do alternate formats are usually very small and working hard to meet the needs of their institutions. So, we needed to offset that understanding with the aim to improve scan quality across ACE community uploads."

Scholars Portal's Accessible Content ePortal (ACE) supports users with print disabilities by providing access to library books in accessible formats. Today, ACE has 27,646 items in its repository – and nearly a quarter of those have been digitized and uploaded by OCUL member libraries.

To help embed that tiered approach to digitization standards, the task group is also redesigning the community submission form. New quality-assurance prompts will require contributors to confirm that files meet minimum scanning and optical character recognition standards. Added fields will allow libraries to indicate which accessibility features are integrated, such as document structure or alternative text. And the revised form aims to also reintroduce stronger copyright safeguards, including contributor confirmation that a submission originates from print resources owned by the institution rather than publisher-provided files.

Ultimately, the task group's work reflects a simple but powerful idea: better scans lead to better experiences. While the immediate goal is to improve content shared through ACE, the impact could extend beyond the service. The standards can apply to a wide range of library digitization activities, from resource sharing to scan-on-demand. Carli hopes libraries will adapt the framework for their own local digitization workflows, helping create a broader culture of quality and accessibility across post-secondary institutions.

Whether a user is accessing content through a screen reader, listening with text-to-speech software, simply searching within a document, or copying text for research, the quality of the original digitization matters. By using shared standards, OCUL member libraries help ensure that accessible content is not only available, but usable, reliable, and ready to meet the needs of diverse campus communities.

ACE Strategic Initiatives Task Group – Digitization Standards

Carli Agostino, Carleton University (Lead)	Joanne Oud, Wilfrid Laurier University
Amelia Clarkson, Ontario Tech University	Bart Kawula, Scholars Portal
Alyssa Lunney, Queen's University	Sabina Pagotto, Scholars Portal



Designing Discovery Together

As part of OCUL’s [Collaborative Futures initiative](#), the Omni academic search tool enables campus communities to discover a province-wide collection of more than 28 million academic resources. With a new user interface planned for summer 2027, Collaborative Futures subcommittees are leading testing and shared configuration development to help libraries prepare for the next iteration of Omni.

For the Collaborative Futures Discovery and User Experience Subcommittee (CFDUX), the move to a re-developed interface presented an opportunity to assess how students, faculty, staff, and individuals with accessibility needs interact with the discovery environment. While the current search tool has well supported content discovery and access since 2019, the forthcoming interface will introduce changes to search pages, requesting features, and how results are displayed. CFDUX recognized these changes will result in system updates that should be guided by direct behaviour – rather than assumptions about how users find, retrieve, and manage academic resources – and created a project to explore user experience.

More than 20 participants across six universities were asked to use a test version of the new interface to complete common tasks involving searching, filtering results, locating full-text content, requesting materials, creating citations, and managing their library accounts. The aim was to identify points of confusion, uncover usability challenges, and better understand how different user groups engage with the platform. CFDUX developed the testing framework in consultation with user experience librarians from OCUL member libraries. Colleagues from Western University, McMaster University, the University of Ottawa, the University of Guelph, OCAD University, and the University of Waterloo contributed their expertise, helping refine user prompts and facilitate local testing.

Reflecting on this work, CFDUX Chair Alie Visser says it has been a meaningful learning experience. “Trying to step outside of my librarian box and see from the perspective of an average user has taught me to look for possible barriers where I may not have initially seen them, and to try and adapt our discovery terminology and systems to improve them.” The user experience project has reinforced an important lesson: That technology systems designed around library terminology and workflows do not always align with users’ expectations. Now, CFDUX is moving forward with analyzing their findings and preparing their recommendations for shared Omni configuration.

The collaborative approach that scaffolds this user experience project exemplifies the value of a library consortium. By pooling expertise and conducting research across institutions, the resulting data reflect a wide range of perspectives, ultimately creating a stronger foundation for evidence-based decisions and more robust library infrastructure grounded in real user needs.

Collaborative Futures Discovery and User Experience Subcommittee

Alie Visser, Western University (Chair)	Anthony Petryk, University of Ottawa
Adam Doan, University of Guelph	Annabelle Drobniak, Queen’s University
Susanna Galbraith, McMaster University	Alys Zhao, University of Waterloo
David Kemper, McMaster University	Sophie Bury, York University

"Larry's steady commitment has strengthened not only the University of Toronto but also research library communities across Ontario, Canada, and beyond.

The legacy of his work will continue to enrich scholarly content access and preservation for many years to come."

Talia Chung, University Librarian and Dean of Libraries at University of Ottawa

Honouring Larry P. Alford

At the spring 2026 meeting of the OCUL Council, outgoing University of Toronto Chief Librarian Larry P. Alford was named the recipient of the OCUL Lifetime Achievement Award, in recognition of a distinguished career characterized by leadership, collaboration, and transformative contributions to the research library community.

Throughout his tenure on the OCUL Council, Larry was instrumental in advancing major collaborative initiatives that have strengthened Canada's research infrastructure. He played a vital role in establishing Borealis as a national data repository service, supporting open research and data preservation. He also helped drive the transition of Scholars Portal Journals to the Canadian Research Knowledge Network, ensuring sustainable access to scholarly resources for academic institutions across the country.

Larry is equally recognized for his dedication to mentorship and professional development. Over the years, he has supported emerging leaders through initiatives such as the ARL Leadership Fellows Program, the Northern Exposure to Leadership Institute, and the Toronto Academic Library Interns Program. Vivian Lewis, Associate Vice-President and University Librarian at McMaster University, highlighted this aspect of Larry's career, remarking that, "Larry has devoted tremendous energy to supporting and mentoring the next generation of library leaders. Through his involvement in various programs, his influence on future leaders has been truly extraordinary."

As the OCUL community celebrates this recognition, Larry's contributions stand as a testament to the collective power of collaboration and a vision for transformative information services that directly benefit students, faculty, and researchers.



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