

2023 – 2024 PROGRESS REPORT



Agricultural Communications Documentation Center

Funk ACES Library, University of Illinois

AGRICULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS DOCUMENTATION CENTER

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

As a special resource and service of the Funk ACES Library, the Agricultural Communications Documentation Center (ACDC) is an increasingly robust, and recognized asset. It contributes uniquely within the four-part “Framework for Strategic Action” of the University Library.

- It capitalizes on the University Library’s national and international leadership by expanding access to unique collections and resources, and by leveraging international engagements to develop unique collections, services, and partnerships.
- It maximizes the use and impact of library services and collections through application of emerging technologies, new service models, and changes in scholarly communications.
- It enhances user success in information retrieval and use, including a variety of outreach, engagement, and marketing strategies.
- It strengthens the campus infrastructure to support scholarship and innovation through resources and services for the full life cycle of scholarly communications.

Overview

During this reporting period (July 2023-June 2024), the ACDC abided by standard fiscal year reporting and the past twelve months brought changes in staffing, operations, and outreach activities. The Center continued work on existing projects, started new projects, and sought out opportunities for collaboration, outreach, and engagement. In addition, the staff members continued to provide excellent service and commitment to ACDC users and the wider community.

Administrative

Staffing and Operations

Assistant Professor Janis Shearer served as head of ACDC during this administrative period, as part of her faculty services within Funk ACES Library. Beyond email contact, Janis Shearer and Associate Jim Evans used phone conferences to share updates and discuss plans for administrative staffing and operations during this period. Among the topics and actions involved in staffing and operations:

- How to identify persons who contribute their services to various aspects of the ACDC mission. Decision: Such persons will be identified as Associate Contributors
- Possible ways in which artificial intelligence might be used to advantage within ACDC operations
- Exploring the possibility of Head Shearer serving as an affiliate faculty member in ALEC

- Potentials and procedures for forming an internal (U of I) and/or external advisory council/board for ACDC
- The ACDC role of Associate Evans, reflecting his extensive experience and evolving capacity

In August of 2023, Nikki Gross, a graduate student in the Information Sciences Program joined the Center to serve as a Graduate Hourly (GH), working on an hourly basis for the 2023-2024 academic year.

In October of 2023, Claire McCormack, an agricultural journalist from Ireland, visited the Agricultural Communications Program at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign and conducted research at the ACDC for her work on media coverage of agriculture & food production in Ireland over the last 50 years. Head Shearer and graduate students Gross and Precious Olalere pulled relevant documents from the Harold Swanson and V1N1 collections and helped McCormack use Bibleaves to find sources.

Precious Olalere, graduate student in the Library and Information Science Program, continued serving as a Graduate Hourly through May 2024.

Associate Contributors continued to play an active role in the ongoing success of the Center. They identified relevant literature from throughout the world, assisted in project development, offered counsel, and provided contacts. Associates during this period included, Jim Evans, emeritus professor of agricultural communications, University of Illinois; Liz Harfull, associate for the Asia/Pacific Region, based in South Australia; and Paul Hixson, emeritus chief information officer, University of Illinois.

Throughout the year, graduate student Olalere continued creating finding aids for the contributed collection of Robert and Susanne Morris. Head Shearer and graduate student Olalere finalized the ACDC deed of gift started by graduate student Riffe and it can be incorporated into our subsequent donated collections.

Graduate student Gross began working on the ACDC/Funk collaborative Box project which consisted of checking backlogged articles against our current catalog and adding the new articles to Bibleaves.

Overall, the Morris Collection continued to be the primary focus during the academic year, while ACDC services continued both virtually and physically through agricultural communications (AGCM) student presence in the center and other patrons.

System Development

As ACDC listserv administrator, Associate Evans periodically reviewed and revised the email address list for persons who receive issues of ACDC News.

Efforts are designed to maintain a bounce rate of less than 1 percent. Head Shearer and Associate Evans discussed the possible need to review adequacy and effectiveness of the current Bibleaves database management system.

Staff members updated the curated services section of the ACDC website, adding and replacing ten links, as well as deleting outdated links.

The Center staff worked closely with Library Information Technology's Infrastructure Management and Support (IT) to document the essential requirements for the bulk upload of The Morris Collection to Bibleaves. Throughout the year, graduate student Olalere used the spreadsheet template created by IT for the Morris Collection bulk upload.

Head Shearer consistently maintained communication with the IT department to keep updating the Bibleaves system anytime we ran into a system issue. She also held a meeting with IT on how the Bibleaves system used by the ACDC can be updated or migrated to a new system as it is currently running on an outdated version of software. In November 2023, Library IT updated the Bibleaves interface, creating a much more user-friendly service for our patrons.

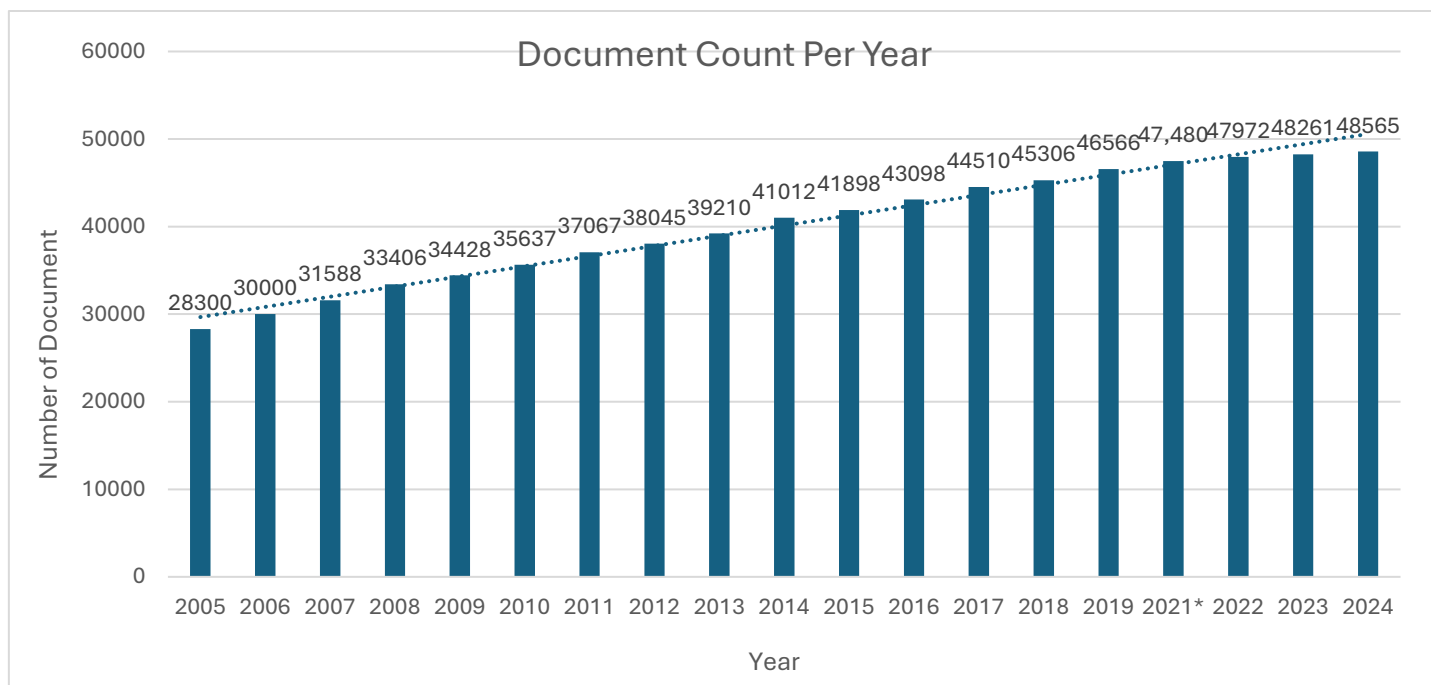
Although the ACDC staff continued to document needs and request IT improvements that will provide detailed metrics involving information needs and requests, search patterns, and other online activities of those who visit the ACDC collection and website, online metrics limitations persisted during this period. To improve the assessment of the center's activities and services, we continued to use LibInsight to record reference interactions.

Content, Programming, and Services

Document Collection

Growth of the ACDC Collections:

The ACDC collection consisted of 48,565 documents at the end of July 2024. About 304 documents were added to the Bibleaves database during the period. This includes documents housed in the ACDC's collection, as well as citations of materials held at other libraries on campus. This continued the upward trend but fell short of the goal of 100 documents added per month but remained consistent with the number of citations added in 2022-2023. The shortfall was due primarily to time invested in special projects and emphasis on processing the Morris Collection.



* Represents the 18-month period between January 2020 – June 2021

Top document formats:

Of the 300+ documents that were added to the Bibleaves database during the twelve-month period covered in this report, the ACDC collected a variety of formats. Most of the collection document types fell under online article, journal article, or other. Some of the ACDC's top sources from this period include The Packer, Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education, Journal of Agricultural Extension, Journal of Applied Communications, and Drovers Magazine. The bulk of newly published works for this period were born-digital, though a selection of physical works were donated and are awaiting cataloging.

Entry Type	Total
Online Article	110
Journal Article	85
Article	14
Opinion	11
Magazine Article	11
Press Release	10
Magazine	9
News Article	6
Blog	5
News Release	5

Report	4
Commentary	3
PowerPoint	3
Book Chapter	2
Online Article and PowerPoint	2
Guide	2
Study	2
Obituary	2
Research Report	2
Handbook	1
Infographic	1
Magazine Editorial	1
Editorial	1
Survey Report	1
Press Statement	1
Correspondence	1
Conference Paper	1
Book Chapter	1
Book Excerpt	1
Letter	1
Survey Report	1
Career Summary	1

Contributed Collections

Staff members continued to identify appropriate documents for the ACDC collection, using online search protocols, and preparing citations for deposit and publication in the Bibleaves system.

Staff members reviewed and considered offers from several professional communicators and leaders and retired or retiring professional communicators.

Associate Evans continued to search for agriculture communication materials to add to Bibleaves while the processing of the Robert and Susanne Morris collection into ACDC database was the priority in the Center.

Visiting agricultural journalist Claire Mc Cormack from Ireland contributed to ACDC and the University of Illinois Library a copy of a recent book featuring the history of Ireland's largest circulation farm periodical:

Mark Duncan and Paul Rouse, *Irish Farmers Journal: A History*. (2021) Self-published. 280 pages.

Opportunities for collaboration

Head Shearer conferred with a selection of ACES faculty members about potentials for ACDC to engage with, and serve, them and their programming interests. Examples include faculty members in the Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications (ALEC) Program of the College of ACES and the statewide Illinois Extension Service.

Staff members also discussed potential opportunities for such collaborations during their monthly staff meetings. With the announcement of the James F. Evans Global Center for Food and Agricultural Communications, staff began to discuss how we might collaborate and support the new organization as it develops.

Head Shearer and Associate Evans discussed opportunities to connect ACDC more closely with other University of Illinois administrative units such as the University Archives, Illinois Extension, and the Agricultural Communications program in the Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications (ALEC) academic unit of ACES College.

They also discussed opportunities for ACDC to cooperate with non-University organizations such as Illinois Agri-Women.

Serving Users

ACDC Newsletters

This open-access online newsletter serves an international audience of more than 900 educators, researchers, professional agricultural journalists and communicators, students, and others. Twelve issues were prepared and distributed during the 2023-2024 program year. Contents focused on research, news and points of view involving communications related to farming, ranching, aquaculture, food and feedstuffs, nutrition, natural resources, renewable energy, rural development, and other aspects of agriculture. Formats ranged broadly across journal articles, books, reports, commentaries, social media, visuals, and face-to-face interactions. Here are some sample topics addressed during the program year in ACDC News:

- Community newspaper in Kansas raided by local police
- How national cultures align with climate change policies
- Update on ag-gag laws
- Consumer responses to foods involving edible insects
- Public understanding and perceptions of “regenerative agriculture”
- Changing strategies for communicating about climate
- Citizen views of farm animal production systems • Participatory photography used by a women’s self-help group in India
- Concerns about rural community media not covering local matters
- Comparing Australian public and farmer views about a variety of current issues
- How extension professionals view climate change and frame communications about it
- Reviewing the state of rural and community journalism in the U.S.

Individual issues provided news and identified research reports being added to the ACDC collection. Associate Evans served as managing editor and maintained the distribution database. Graduate student Gross proofread, formatted, posted the newsletter to the Center’s social media (X) account beginning in October of 2023.

In February of 2024, the ACDC transitioned from using the word “here” to link to articles in the newsletter to linking the name of the article. This increased the accessibility of the newsletter to patrons who utilize screen readers and complies with the best practices recommended by the University Library’s Office of Digital Strategies.

Social media

Outreach over social media took place through ACDC’s X (formerly Twitter) account. The account is used to interact with the Funk ACES Library, industry professionals, and users of the Bibleaves citation database. It is updated with current updates relevant to center events, exhibits, local programming at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Funk Library, and to advertise the publishing of the Center’s newsletters. X interaction was primarily with the Funk ACES Library account, and other University accounts. The rate of engagement decreased from 36.56% in the previous year to 10.72% in the current year.

Outreach Activities

Partnership with AgNIC:

The University of Illinois continued to serve as national "Center of Excellence" in agricultural communications as a partner in the Agriculture Network Information Collaborative (AgNIC) of the National Agricultural Library. ACDC serves as the portal for information about agricultural communications within this worldwide online agricultural information system.

- In May, Head Shearer attended the joint U.S. Agricultural Information Network & The Council on Botanical and Horticultural Libraries 2024 Biennial Meeting in East Lansing, Michigan, which also hosted AgNIC’s Annual Meeting.

Partnership with the Agricultural Communications Program of ALEC:

Head Shearer and Associate Evans continued to confer about ongoing and potential collaborations with colleagues in the ALEC academic unit.

Partnership with IFAJ:

This professional organization, The International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ), serves some 5,000 members in 60 countries. A long-time collaboration with ACDC continued during this period.

- The ACDC website continued to provide a special section for IFAJ members to acquaint them with ACDC resources and to offer information services to them.

Marketing Materials:

Staff members continued to distribute the ACDC brochure electronically to an on-campus list of selected administrators, faculty and staff members throughout the University Library, College of ACES, College of Media, and University of Illinois Extension.

Special Searches, Requests, and Contacts:

In February, we received a research request from a graduate student in the iSchool who wished to conduct a preservation audit on the ACDC collection for their class. This audit focused on 50 books housed within our collection under search terms such as “media,” “traditional media,” “radio,” “mass media,” among others. This project required searching and pulling all the materials which were then reviewed and assessed by the student.

During June we responded to a request for information about the history of experiential learning and leadership in the College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences (ACES) at the University of Illinois.

Other outreach activities

In the beginning of the Spring 2024 semester, the ACDC team discussed possible outreach and engagement opportunities to make the Center a more welcoming space for students as well as increased awareness of our services. Graduate student Gross and Head Shearer worked together to develop a plan to rearrange the furniture in the Center so that the physical space felt more comfortable for students and researchers.

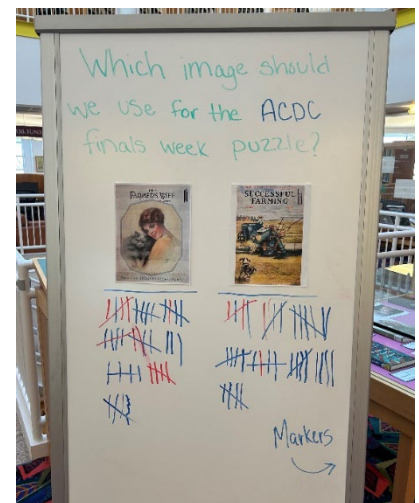
The team also created a puzzle and raffle to help increase awareness of the Center to students within the Funk library. They selected two images (both of which were out of copyright) from our collection and used a whiteboard poll to gauge interest on which image students would prefer to see as a puzzle. After selecting the cover of a 1929 issue of the *Farmer's Wife*, GH Gross and Head Shearer ordered the puzzle. GH Gross also selected and purchased a raffle prize (tote bag and bookmark), that students could enter to win through a QR kept near the puzzle. Since the puzzle arrived after the beginning of Spring finals, it was determined that the puzzle/raffle would be implemented in the Fall.

Encouragements from Users and Reviewers

Following are examples of feedback from faculty members, professional journalists and communicators, organizations, students, and others during this period. The samples reflect responses to individual search and advisory services provided by ACDC, issues of ACDC News, and various features of the ACDC resources, services, and website.

“Thank you so much for sharing ACDC News. Highly appreciated.”

“Thank you for your regular ACDC News.”



“Thanks for your support and for linking to my column. While the Institute for Rural Journalism is based at the University of Kentucky, we have a national focus and enjoy our partnerships and associations with other universities.”

“Thanks for the updates over the years!”

“You were the jackpot for historical context! Thank you so much!

“This is wonderful information that is precisely what we needed as we move forward on some of our promotional and visioning materials!”

“We have disseminated the material to our faculty members and research and extension personnel at the Department of Development Broadcasting and Telecommunications and at the Department of Development Journalism.”