

**History, Philosophy, and Newspaper Library**  
**African American Research Center**  
**Annual Report FY2021**

**I Unit Narrative**

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1. Major activities and accomplishments of the unit in FY21 (July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021)

Impact of COVID-19: Because our core user groups are among those traditionally most dependent on in-person access to library materials, our primary focus in FY21 was on helping students, faculty, staff, and Illinois citizens overcome the challenges to continuing their research and learning while the Library was closed to users. We concentrated on finding solutions to access issues, and on providing students and researchers with tools and skills to pursue in depth research projects using available resources. HPNL staff also contributed to the onsite work that made it possible for the Library to resume Document Delivery services and circulation of print materials.

Highlights of the year include:

- With the Preservation Department, we applied for and were granted a one-year extension of our 2018-2020 National Digital Newspaper Program (NDNP) grant to digitize 100,000 pages of historic Illinois newspapers relating to marginalized communities. HPNL/AARC contributed to the completion of the project by researching and writing required historical essays about each newspaper title, and promoting the project via social media and the Illinois Newspaper Project web site, [www.library.illinois.edu/illinoisnewspaperproject](http://www.library.illinois.edu/illinoisnewspaperproject). We also began planning a speaker series on African American newspaper history that grew out of research for the African American newspapers that we digitized in this round of NDNP funding.
- HPNL/AARC faculty member Courtney Becks hosted and moderated a virtual event in the Center for Advanced Study (CAS) MillerComm Lecture Series, “An Evening of Poetry and Spirituality,” a virtual visit by Iranian-American poet Kaveh Akbar. HPNL co-sponsored the event.
- We made strategic additions to the library’s collections in spite of the necessity of significant expenditure to support the “e-first” policy. Major acquisitions this year included expanded access to digitized newspapers (*Chicago Tribune*, 1996 – 2001, *Los Angeles Times*, 1996 – 2012, and *Chicago Defender*, 1975 – 2010, and a contribution to *Japan Chronicle*), new subject areas and years of coverage in *Oxford Handbooks Online* and *Oxford Bibliographies Online*, the online *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, and major contributions to the Map Library’s purchase of rare maps. *Southern Life and African American History: 1775-1915*, *Plantation Records Part 2*, a digital collection for which we advocated, was purchased with year-end funding.

- We served local and broader Illinois community library users through the Illinois Newspaper Project (including ongoing maintenance of Illinois Newspaper Directory, which helped researchers locate accessible resources during COVID closures), remote access to microfilm, and a virtual presentation given by HPNL head, Celestina Savonius-Wroth, to the Champaign County Genealogical Society.
- While our unit was closed to in-person use, we made significant progress on reviewing our circulating collection, converting titles selected for retention in our core collection from Dewey Decimal to Library of Congress classification (in view of streamlined integration with other onsite core collections), and developing a popular history collection to replace the Undergraduate Library's popular history collection.
- We provided robust instructional and orientation programming in the virtual environment, including a virtual introduction to the Library (a recorded Zoom session) for admitted History students, [https://mediaspace.illinois.edu/media/t/1\\_w2a4k8s2](https://mediaspace.illinois.edu/media/t/1_w2a4k8s2).

## 2. Major challenges faced by the unit during the period

- Like everyone else in the Library, we weathered the dual challenges of the Alma migration and the COVID-19 crisis.
- Almost all of the members of our small staff have higher risk factors or household members with higher risk factors.
- We work with a user group (students and researchers in History and related fields) that is especially dependent on in-person access to library materials, and we are responsible for the Library's largest collection of microformats, which require a large investment of staff time to be used remotely by library users.

## 3. Contributions to Library-wide programs:

- Reference, research consultations, and other information services:
  - HPNL/AARC faculty, staff, and student employees provided robust reference and research support, adapting creatively to meet challenges of COVID-19 conditions.
  - Provided remote access to microfilm.
  - Geoff, Courtney, and Jerilyn contributed regular hours to virtual staffing of the main Information Desk.
  - Celestina, Courtney, Geoff, and Jerilyn provided individualized research consultations for faculty and students.
  - Under Geoff's direction, HPNL continued to develop the Newspaper Database and the Illinois Newspaper Directory, newspaper resources that are valued by researchers across the state and the country

- Instruction, liaison, outreach/engagement:
  - Celestina, Courtney, Geoff, and Jerilyn provided library instruction and created course-specific research guides for undergraduate courses in History, African American Studies, and Philosophy.
  - We also created and maintained topical research guides in our subject areas.
    - Especially noteworthy: Jerilyn made significant enhancements to a History of Science research guide, <https://guides.library.illinois.edu/history-science>. This project was carried out in coordination with a related project in the University Archives (funded through an HPNL gift fund), resulting in a guide to natural and applied sciences archival materials at the University of Illinois, <https://guides.library.illinois.edu/c.php?g=1031074>.
  - Celestina introduced new graduate students in History and Religious Studies to the Library:
    - Met (virtually) with new graduate students during Orientation
    - Organized a virtual introduction to the Library as part of Department of History's Graduate Proseminar (required for all new graduate students), invited colleagues with relevant subject expertise to participate, and served as main presenter.
    - Created an asynchronous presentation to introduce admitted graduate students in History to the Library's resources.
  - Celestina and Courtney served as the Library's liaisons to African American Studies and Jewish Studies (Courtney), History, Philosophy, and Religious Studies (Celestina).
    - Activities included attending orientation and other departmental events, meeting with department chairs, directors of undergraduate and graduate studies, library liaisons and departmental Library Committees, meeting candidates for faculty positions and prospective graduate students, discussing library acquisitions with faculty and students, and maintaining regular contact with our departments and programs, keeping faculty and students abreast of new collections and services, and soliciting their input on library matters.
    - Communicated regularly with departments about impact of COVID-19 on library services and access to collections.
  - Celestina, as affiliate faculty, attended departmental meetings in History; participated in the Department of History's Pre-modern Reading Group.
  - Celestina met with Advancement and donors to discuss plans for resuming the Library Travel Grant program once conditions permit.
  - Geoff participated in the Library's Doctoral Research Support Program, including helping to lead interdisciplinary workshops, organizing networking events, and meeting with doctoral students.
- Digital content creation:
  - Celestina, Courtney, Geoff, Jerilyn, Sarah, and Connor worked with Preservation on the 2020-2021 extension to the National Digital Newspaper Program newspaper digitization grant to digitize 100,000 pages of historic Illinois newspapers relating to marginalized communities.

- Collection development:
    - Built the Library's collections in the areas of African American Studies, History, Philosophy, historical newspapers, Religious Studies, History of Science, and Jewish Studies.
    - Managed a total collections budget of nearly \$600,000 (in addition to four approval plan funds).
    - Took over collection development responsibility from Undergraduate Library for popular-audience history books.
    - Developed efficient process to meet needs of the Library's Electronic First policy.
  - Collection management:
    - Continued the project to reclassify HPNL's collection from DDC to LCC.
    - Worked with the Ricker Architecture and Art Library to plan for transfer of microform collections from Ricker to HPNL.
    - Geoff processed three large gifts of historic print newspapers.
  - Staff training and development
    - All members of the unit completed Alma/Primo training appropriate to their job responsibilities.
    - Geoff, Courtney, Jerilyn, and Celestina developed online/remote teaching skills and strategies.
    - Sarah took the lead in training other HPNL staff to provide remote access to microfilm.
  - Diversity
    - Geoff and Jerilyn researched and wrote titles essays and blog posts about African American newspapers digitized for the Illinois Newspaper Project/National Digital Newspaper Program.
    - Jerilyn and Sarah planned a speaker series on African American newspapers, in preparation for an application for Outreach and Engagement funding (the series has been postponed to Spring 2023).
  - Public engagement
    - Courtney hosted and moderated a successful and well-attended virtual visit from Iranian-American poet Kaveh Akbar, ""An Evening of Poetry and Spirituality,"" in the CAS MillerComm speaker series. HPNL co-sponsored the visit.
    - Celestina gave a virtual presentation about online newspaper resources to the Champaign County Genealogical Society.
  - Library service
    - Celestina and Courtney served on the Strategic Communications and Marketing Committee.
    - Geoff served on the Library Assessment Committee.
4. Review of progress made on Unit Annual Goals for FY21 (as enumerated in the FY20 Unit Annual Report)

Accomplished: Complete research- and outreach/promotion-related work on 2018-2020 National Digital Newspaper Project grant (due to delays caused by COVID-19 crisis, this grant was

extended until August 2021).

Accomplished (as well as ongoing): Build on skills and strategies for remote instruction and remote access gained during COVID-19 crisis to provide flexible and innovative services.

Progress: Conditions permitting, rebuild sense of community in HPNL's physical space.

- We planned for a safe re-opening (June 2021) and began discussions about how to use a gift earmarked for study carrels received through Advancement's "Library is looking for" initiative.

Progress: Develop a popular-audience history collection and use displays of new books and social media to attract undergraduates to HPNL and encourage reading for pleasure.

- Graduate assistant Jerilyn Tinio selected an attractive list of popular history materials published in 2020-2021 to add to our collections.

Progress: Work with Main Library and Undergraduate Library colleagues to develop vision for Main Library spaces in light of the Library Building Plan. Continue review of circulating collection and conversion of high-use items from Dewey to LC classification.

Ongoing: Assess appropriate balance of print and electronic formats for collection development, in light of a year and a half of acquisitions that prioritized electronic.

Progress: Work with Preservation to develop a plan to continue the work of the Illinois Newspaper Project, including exploring other external funding opportunities.

- We conceptualized a new approach to National Digital Newspaper Program funding (a call for proposals from libraries and other relevant institutions in the state of Illinois) which we hope will bear fruit in FY22.

## 5. Unit Annual Goals for FY22.

- Develop programming related to our subject areas and collections that supports diversity, equity, and inclusion and helps to rebuild a sense of community in HPNL's physical space. (SD2, SD3)
  - Use displays of new books in our popular-audience history collection, and social media, to attract undergraduates to HPNL and encourage reading for pleasure.
- Work with Main Library and Undergraduate Library colleagues to develop vision for Main Library spaces in light of the Library Building Plan. (SD3)
  - Continue review of circulating collection and conversion of high-use items from Dewey to LC classification. (SD1)
  - Assess appropriate balance of print and electronic formats for collection development, in light of a year of acquisitions that prioritized electronic. (SD1)

- Work with Preservation to apply for 2022-2024 National Digital Newspaper Program funding to continue the work of the Illinois Newspaper Project. (SD3, SD4)
- Work with instructors and instruction-focused library colleagues to build upon skills and strategies for innovative instruction services, including transitioning some core instructional content from libguides to Canvas modules. (SD1, SD2)

## 6. Graduate Assistants

- Jerilyn Tinio (Graduate Assistant/graduate hourly employee) (.5 FTE, July 1, 2020-August 15, 2021) – funded with a combination of grant funding (National Digital Newspaper Program), state funds and gift funds. Jerilyn’s contributions to the unit and Library in FY21 included:
  - Newspaper research and outreach/promotion initiatives for the 2020-21 National Digital Newspaper Program grant.
  - Participating in the unit’s instructional work, including an assessment of learning outcomes and teaching strategies used in instructional sessions for required courses in the history major, and developing teaching strategies for remote sessions.
  - Providing virtual reference coverage at the main Information Hub.
  - Assisting with onsite tasks that allowed the Library to circulate print collections and provide Document Delivery services.
  - Working onsite in HPNL as needed to consult physical collections to answer reference questions and provide remote access to microfilm.
  - Social media outreach for HPNL/AARC and the Illinois Newspaper Project, including writing and editing blog posts for INP blog.
  - Revising and updating research guides on the unit’s web site, including significant enhancements to History of Science guide, <https://guides.library.illinois.edu/history-science>. This project was carried out in coordination with a related project in the University Archives (funded through an HPNL gift fund), resulting in a guide to natural and applied sciences archival materials at the University of Illinois, <https://guides.library.illinois.edu/c.php?g=1031074>.
  - Collection development for popular history and Italian history.

## II Statistical Profile

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### 1. Facilities

- User seating counts (not applicable –we were closed for in-person use for all but the final two weeks of FY21)
- Number of hours open to the public per week (not applicable – we were closed for in-person use

all but the final two weeks of FY21)

## 2. Personnel

- Celestina Savonius-Wroth (Head, faculty) (1 FTE)
- Courtney Becks (Faculty) (1 FTE)
- Geoffrey Thomas Ross (Collections and Services Specialist, Academic Professional) (1FTE)
- Kimberly Lerch (Senior Library Specialist) (.75 FTE)
- Sarah Bial (Library Specialist) (1 FTE)
- Jerilyn Tinio (Graduate assistant/grad hourly, see above for detail) (.5 FTE)
- student hourly: one graduate hourly, Connor Monson, 10-15 hours per week from fall semester 2020 through summer 2021, paid on state funds

## 3. User Services

- Gate Count: not applicable (we were closed to the public for all but the last two weeks of FY21, when we were open limited hours by appointment)
- Circulation
  - 1,125 loans, 663 renewals
- Reference interactions (extrapolated from Sweeps Week data): 768
- Presentations (from the Instructional Statistics database)
  - Number of presentations to groups (synchronous): 19
  - Number of participants in group presentations (synchronous): 318
- additional presentations (not recorded in Instructional Statistics database): one asynchronous presentation for 15-20 participants

## 4. Other statistics (optional)

- 496 new bibliographic records and 1,545 new holding records added to the University of Illinois Library Newspaper Database
- 171,004 uses of the 67 libguides created and maintained by our unit

## III Appendices (optional)

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- Please see attached HPNL\_FY21\_Appendix.pdf (Kaveh Akbar flyer).

## Kaveh Akbar

Assistant Professor of English,  
Purdue University

Friday  
April 30, 2021  
7:00pm CDT

Registration is required for this  
Zoom event. See below.

University of Illinois  
at Urbana-Champaign

**HOSTED BY:**

History, Philosophy, and Newspaper Library

**IN CONJUNCTION WITH:**

Center for South Asian and  
Middle Eastern Studies  
Creative Writing Program  
Department of Asian American Studies  
Department of Comparative and  
World Literatures  
Department of English  
Department of Gender and Women's Studies  
Department of Linguistics  
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Photo: Hieu Minh Nguyen



# An Evening of Poetry and Spirituality

Poet Kaveh Akbar's work is exciting, beautiful, often disorienting and urgent. Reflected in his poems are the many facets of his identity—he is Iranian-American, largely Midwestern, queer, Muslim, and in recovery. He is thereby situated in the new wave of poets drawing not only on technical mastery, but also the immediacy of their lived experiences to connect with new audiences for linguistically-charged art.

Registration is required for this Zoom event: Scan the code or visit <http://cas.illinois.edu/node/2497>

For background information, consult [cas.illinois.edu](http://cas.illinois.edu) or call 217-333-6729.

