An Interview With Ray English ’69
Highly Decorated Director of Libraries at Oberlin College

Ray English is the Azariah Smith Root Director of Libraries at Oberlin College, one of Davidson’s peer institutions. He has been nationally recognized for his contributions to librarianship. The Association of College and Research Libraries named him Academic Research Librarian of the year in 2006 and he received the Hugh Atkinson Memorial Award from the American Library Association in 2009.

You majored in German at Davidson and completed a Ph.D. in German literature. How did you become a librarian? Do you have any regrets?

As you suggest, librarianship was a second career choice for me. I had intended to teach German, but the job market for college language teachers collapsed as I was finishing my Ph.D. So, I decided to transition into academic librarianship. I have absolutely no regrets. I could never have imagined a more interesting and challenging profession. There’s great variety in the work, constant change brought by technological innovation, and the satisfaction of being a central part of the educational process. Many Davidson students should consider librarianship as a possible career. The work is meaningful, engaging, and socially beneficial. There are various types of libraries and library jobs, so there’s a good chance of finding a career path that fits one’s personality and interests. A sound liberal arts education, which Davidson certainly provides, is absolutely the best preparation for the field.

You are known for your passion for scholarly communication and as a strong proponent of open access. There hasn’t been much conversation at Davidson about open access. What should faculty and librarians here be thinking about?

Open access is the most powerful strategy developed so far for addressing serious dysfunctions in the system of scholarly communication. Those problems include economic pressures on university press book publishing and insufficient access to journals due to their high cost. I would encourage Davidson faculty and librarians to learn more about both open access and the rights of authors under copyright. Our faculty at Oberlin passed an open access policy in 2009 that’s very similar to the one that was adopted by Harvard’s faculty of Arts and Sciences a year earlier. Similar policies have now been implemented at many universities, such as Duke, Kansas, and MIT, and at peer colleges like Bucknell, Lafayette, Rollins, and Trinity. Widespread adoption of open access, both by individuals and institutions, can go a long way toward fostering the systemic transformation that’s clearly needed if we’re to reach a point where scholarly works are produced and disseminated in ways that best serve the interests of the academy and the advancement of knowledge.

What change has your library implemented recently that has received the biggest praise from students and faculty?

We renovated the main floor of our main library a few years ago to create a space that we call the Academic Commons. It includes seven group study rooms, a digital media area, tables designed for collaboration, about 30 computer workstations, an electronic classroom, a current reading area, a café, and comfortable lounge seating that’s dispersed throughout the floor. We provide both research assistance and technology help there, and our writing center is located in one of the group study rooms. The Academic Commons is one of the most popular and heavily used spaces on campus.

What are the major library initiatives and issues at Oberlin?

Two areas that stand out are book studies and information literacy. Faculty in several departments at Oberlin are interested in developing books studies into an (cont’d on page 2)
What’s Coming Up Online

Crowdsourcing, Citizen Archivists, Participatory Archives—these are some of the buzzwords in the library special collections world. We’re moving from making a few of our most popular items available online and gathering data into browsable timelines and encyclopedias to inviting people to enter actively into our online collections—not just to browse but to help transcribe, catalog and build the collections.

Newly launched on the Library’s website under Archives and Special Collections pages is our Archives Community Space (sites.davidson.edu/archives/community). We are inviting you to be a research partner by helping transcribe the Civil War diary of Davidson alumnus William E. Ardrey or helping us identify people and places in photographs. Come in to share photographs or memories of the town and college and deepen the history of student organizations, local personalities, and stories people ought to know.

Gift Opportunities: Online Resources

Interested in donating to the library? Did you know that your gift can go toward an online resource as well as a book? We have a wish list of online resources, in all price ranges, that we’d love to have. These digital collections are very popular with students and faculty! If you are interested in learning more, please contact Susanna Boylston (suboylst@davidson.edu).

Examples of recent gifts that have gone toward the purchase of online resources include the Latin American Newspapers database, purchased with a donation from Mrs. Laura Landoe, a Davidson parent, and The Times Digital Archive (1785-2006), which we acquired with a gift from the Malcolm Lester Library Trust.

What technology devices have changed your life in recent years?

I suppose I’m up to my ears in technology devices. I use a smartphone a lot. My newest one, which has an Android operating system, is convenient for e-mail, texting, Internet access, and spontaneous photos. I also do a lot of correspondence by dictating with a hand-held digital recorder and then transferring the sound files electronically to my secretary. I’m now experimenting with voice recognition software and I’m finding it to be a real time saver, too. I also take an iPad when I make short trips. It’s actually better than the mobile phone for routine communication, and the one I have now has very good voice recognition capabilities, which is great for responding to e-mail. I’m also quite fond of the switches that allow you to turn all of these things off from time to time!

Meet Ben Farnham

Ben Farnham has joined the Discovery Systems team as our new archives assistant. Farnham holds a B.A. in political science and an M.A. in sociology, both earned at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC). He is currently working on his M.S.L.I.S through Florida State University’s online program.

He is working on a broad range of projects including contributing to the Davidson Encyclopedia, Around the D (archives blog), the archives Web site, enhancing our digital collections, and creating some exciting new online mapping projects that will be unveiled soon.

In addition to his duties at Davidson, Farnham also works at UNCC as an IT support technician and claims to have the largest dog among the library staff, weighing in at more than 150 pounds. Please join us in welcoming Ben Farnham.

What are you reading currently?

I’ve recently been reading several books in the field of psychology. This summer I worked through Daniel Kahneman’s Thinking Fast and Slow and a couple of books by Jonathan Haidt—The Righteous Mind and The Happiness Hypothesis. Kahneman’s book, in particular, is extraordinary. At the moment I’m reading books by Stephen Pinker—The Blank Slate and How the Mind Works. Pinker’s The Better Angels of Our Nature is next on my list.

When is the last time you visited Davidson?

I visited quite recently, at the end of this past April. The occasion was Hansford Epes’ retirement. Hansford was the adviser for our 1967–68 junior year abroad group in Marburg, Germany. Thirteen out of fourteen members of our group made it back to campus for the occasion. In addition to attending the reception that the college held in his honor, we had a group dinner where we celebrated Hansford and showed slides from our JYA experience. It was great fun for all of us.
DONOR LISTS

Each year, we are so grateful for the generosity of people who contribute in many different ways to the library. The following lists encapsulate some of the ways people honor loved ones, friends, esteemed scholars, and others through their contributions. You’ll find contributions to existing endowed funds, new funds that have been established, book and archival donations, and funds given by the Alumni Office to memorialize former students. To all who have honored us this year with gifts, we extend our most heartfelt thanks. Your gifts greatly enhance our collection and the educational experience of Davidson students.

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The L.D. & Lilian Benton Wharton Fund
The Mary Tilley Wharton Fund
The Robert Clark Whitten, Ph.D. ’66 Fund
Mr. Albert Keiser Jr., ’66
The Charles Nelson Williamson, M.D. ’64 Fund
The Charles Nelson Williamson Trust
The Rev. Edward Lee Willingham III ’48 Fund
The Jack Williams, Jr. ’34 Fund
The Robert C. Williams Fund
The Walter L. ’46 & Carolyn Cooner Withers Fund
The A. Allen Wolf Fund
in honor of Mrs. Alston Osgood Wolf’s birthday
Mrs. Jane B. Woodson Adams
Mrs. Ellen B. Allen
Mr. John P. Ansell
Ms. Florence A. Campbell
Mrs. Caroline Cox
Ms. Ann Dornblazer
Mrs. Lynn R. Edelstein
Mr. Brent William Elmore
Ms. Eileen Feibus
Ms. Carolyn K. Hennes
Mr. W. T. Hopkins
Mr. Bob Jacobs
Mrs. Betty H. Lathan
Ms. Elise K. Menaker
Ms. Betty Reiter
Ms. Ruth R. Threalt
Dr. Karen Welty-Wolf
Ms. Marcia G. Wentz
Mrs. Ann White
Mr. William Wisdom
Mr. Albert Allen Wolf, Jr.
Mrs. Alston Osgood Wolf
The Jack Womeldorf ’61 Fund
Mr. John H. Womeldorf ’61
The Robert Davidson Woodward, Jr. Fund
Dr. and Mrs. Scott Gregory
Dr. J. Lawrence McNeill, Jr. ’60
The Rev. Mary Katherine G. Robinson ’93
The Lauren W. Yoder Fund
Dr. George Wilkinson Poe ’74
Dr. Karl A. Plank
Ms. Alice C. Schoo-Jerger
Dr. and Mrs. John Zirkle
The Rosemary Levy Zumwalt Fund
For years, endowed library resource funds have provided donors with an opportunity to honor loved ones in a very meaningful way; they have enabled the Davidson College Library to expand the breadth and depth of its collection. We have always been grateful for these funds and honor the personal relationships that they represent. To better thank the establishers of these funds and to widen the audience of people who can see and appreciate their generosity, we have joined many libraries across the county in implementing digital bookplates for items acquired from June 2003 forward.

When patrons pull up a resource record in the on-line catalog, they will see a link to information about the endowed fund that purchased that resource. Patrons no longer have to have a book in hand to view bookplate information. And, if patrons click on the name of the endowed fund from the on-line catalog, fund information will appear in a new window as shown in this image (we know that the screen shot is difficult to read.) Please visit our Web site for better viewing:


From this screen, patrons can click on the Return to Digital Bookplates Home. They will be redirected to a landing page where they can search through our endowed library resource funds, seeing which ones exist, who established them, and what resource have been purchased through them.

This project was a major undertaking and required key personnel from both the library and Information Technology Services to work on Web applications and databases that run our online systems. However, we feel that acknowledging the generosity of our donors in a much more prominent way was well worth the effort. Anyone visiting our Web site from anywhere in the world can now easily see when items have been provided through an endowed fund.