



How AI is creating capacity for librarian expertise

Library workflows are in the “sweet spot” for AI support that builds productivity instead of controversy

Academic libraries are under increasing pressure to support more users, more content and more institutional priorities with finite staff and resources. At the same time, many library workflows remain highly manual, requiring significant time and expertise to complete.

Artificial intelligence is frequently discussed in the context of teaching, learning and research. However, many of the most promising applications of AI lie behind the scenes in academic libraries, with characteristics that make them particularly well suited to responsible adoption: they are staff-facing rather than patron-facing, operational and rules-based. As a result, libraries can often begin exploring AI in workflows such as metadata creation, content processing and course materials management without stepping into the more contentious debates surrounding student- and researcher-facing workflows.

In a recent webinar **Melissa Gomis**, Chair, Collections Strategy & Open Scholarship, University Libraries, **University of Nebraska-Lincoln**, and **Amit Niv**, Head

of Metadata and Process Management, **Younes & Soraya Nazarian Library**, joined **Adil Husain**, founder of the research firm **Emerging Strategy**, to discuss how effective application of AI can accelerate library workflows, maintain human oversight and support institutional goals and priorities.

Read on for highlights from their discussion. Find a link to watch the entire webinar on demand at the end of this report.

Library Operations Are in the Sweet Spot

Staff-facing

Not end-user facing

Operational

Not academic

Rules-based

Not judgement-replacing

The conditions for adoption with minimal friction are already in place.

Image courtesy of Emerging Strategy

Measuring AI's impact on library work

As institutional interest in AI grows, it's sparked an ongoing debate about where the technology can be adopted confidently and responsibly. Data from Pulse of the Library, an annual global survey, shows growing interest among academic librarians in using AI to accelerate productivity.

But what happens when AI is applied to actual library workflows? Where does it create value and what happens to human expertise at the core of library work?

To answer these questions, **Clarivate** partnered with **Emerging Strategy** to conduct an independent qualitative study of AI adoption in academic libraries. **The Academic AI Impact Study** included in-depth interviews with 11 library professionals across eight institutions on three continents, focusing on two high-volume workflows: course reading list creation and cataloging. The goal was to understand how practicing librarians were using AI under real-world conditions and constraints.

The research revealed a consistent pattern. Libraries were experiencing **meaningful gains when they applied AI to operational workflows that are repetitive, time-intensive and difficult to scale.**

For example, institutions reported reducing reading-list preparation from as long as 45 minutes to as little as two to five minutes. Metadata teams were able to enrich hundreds of records per day. In many cases, AI-generated outputs required only minor review before they could be used. Most importantly, **libraries were able to redirect staff time from repetitive preparation work toward decision-making, quality control and user support.**

30–60%

reduction in time
on manual work

2–4x

increase in feasible
workload, no added staff

50–60%

of reading lists
immediately available

70–90%

of AI output accepted
with minor edits

Image courtesy of Emerging Strategy

"AI in this context is not about making decisions that concern students. It's not touching academic integrity. It's not replacing professional judgment. It's doing the transcription, the parsing, the first-draft compilation, so that librarians can do the work that actually requires expertise."

Adil Husain, Founder and Managing Director, Emerging Strategy

Creating capacity for library work

"Staffing shortages are real. They were before AI, and this is just our way to handle the staffing shortages that were existing even before that."

Amit Niv, Head of Metadata and Process Management, Younes & Soraya Nazarian Library

As AI adoption grows across higher education, questions often focus on what tasks can be automated. The Academic AI Impact Study suggests a more useful question for libraries: **how can AI create additional capacity for work that depends on librarian expertise?** Across participating institutions, including the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) and the Younes & Soraya Nazarian Library, AI is being used to accelerate preparation and processing tasks while leaving responsibility for judgment, oversight, decision making and further exploration firmly in human hands.

These libraries were willing to experiment, despite encountering the same concerns many organizations face when introducing AI. "There were some fears at the beginning," says Amit Niv of the Younes & Soraya Nazarian Library. However, over time, those concerns gave way to a more practical understanding of the technology's role. "It's helping us do our day-to-day jobs in a quicker way, in a more efficient way, and leaves time for us to do the tasks that need more thinking and human decisions."

Melissa Gomis had a similar vision for speed and scale at UNL. The institution was already looking for ways to expand its course materials program and increase access to affordable learning resources. "I framed AI as a potential way to help us achieve our goal and to be able to scale up an already successful program."

Both libraries arrived at the same conclusion. Human expertise remained essential. What changed was where librarians spent their time.



Scaling an affordability program at University of Nebraska-Lincoln

"Our goal was always to grow that program as much as we could, and I see the Leganto Syllabus Assistant as a way to achieve a goal that we've had since the beginning, even before AI was something we could use to help solve our problem."

Melissa Gomis, Chair, Collections Strategy & Open Scholarship, University Libraries,
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

At UNL, Gomis and her colleagues were working toward an ambitious goal: expanding student access to affordable and openly available course materials across a campus that supports more than 5,000 courses and course sections each semester.

The library wanted to identify course materials, determine whether lower-cost alternatives existed and connect students with library-owned, licensed or openly available resources. Yet obtaining and processing that information at scale remained difficult.

Gomis and her team reconsidered the workflow and asked: "What if the process started with the libraries?"

That question became the foundation for a new approach. Instead of relying on downstream data sources, the library explored a model in which reading lists could be created directly from faculty syllabi, giving the library access to the information needed to analyze course materials, identify library-owned alternatives and support affordability initiatives earlier in the process.

The **Leganto Syllabus Assistant** became an important part of that effort. This AI component sits on top of the Leganto reading list management solution, which was already established and widely used at UNL. The Assistant transforms syllabus content into structured reading lists, enabling the library to generate course-material data at a scale that would have been difficult to achieve manually. More importantly, **the workflow allowed staff to focus less on repetitive list creation and more on evaluating options, managing collections and supporting instructors.**

In an initial pilot, the library found that 89% of courses were not using the lowest-cost version of their assigned materials. **The analysis also revealed opportunities to provide additional resources through the library's existing collections.**

Throughout the process, librarians remained responsible for validating and refining results. Every reading list and course-material record was reviewed by staff before being used in the program.

For UNL, the value of AI was the ability to create a workflow capable of operating at institutional scale while keeping librarians at the center of the decisions that affect collections, affordability and student access.

Cataloging productivity at Younes & Soraya Nazarian Library

"We think it's very important to acknowledge that we use AI on our records because we have nothing to be ashamed of, but also because if we expect our students at the university to acknowledge when they use AI in their work, it's only fair that we would do the same."

Amit Niv, Head of Metadata and Process Management, Younes & Soraya Nazarian Library

At the Younes & Soraya Nazarian Library, Amit Niv and her team support researchers across disciplines ranging from the humanities to medicine while processing approximately 1,000 theses and dissertations each year. Assigning subject headings, enriching records and improving discoverability are essential tasks, but they can also be time-consuming and difficult to scale.

One area where the library has seen meaningful impact is the use of **Alma Metadata Assistant** to enrich existing records. The AI tool provides the first draft, generating descriptive content, extracting information from source materials and suggesting subject headings that catalogers can review and refine. The workflow focuses cataloging expertise on evaluation and decision-making, with librarians still responsible for the final record. Instead of spending valuable time on repetitive data entry, staff can focus on interpreting, refining and improving metadata to align with local authority standards and provide the contextual knowledge that cannot be fully captured by automated systems.

"We go through all of the subject headings. We do human validation."

Amit Niv, Head of Metadata and Process Management, Younes & Soraya Nazarian Library

The benefits extend beyond staff productivity. Students at the university frequently use tables of contents to determine whether a book is relevant to their research needs. With AI assistance, the library can use images of the tables of contents to easily add them to records, enhancing discoverability.

The result is a workflow that yields additional capacity to address work that might otherwise remain unfinished.

"It leaves us time to deal with things that we used to defer and usually never do. Now we can do them, because the simple things, the things that can be automated, are automated."

Amit Niv, Head of Metadata and Process Management, Younes & Soraya Nazarian Library

Where AI fits best

Across these institutions, successful implementations began with a clearly defined problem rather than a broad initiative to “implement AI.” Libraries identified specific workflows that were creating friction, tested solutions in a limited way and gradually expanded from there.

The emphasis was not on trusting AI. It was on creating processes that allowed people to trust the results.

As Gomis advised: “Start with one problem. Do not get overwhelmed with all the AI potential available.”

Niv offered similar guidance: “Start small. Choose one task and try to automate it.”

What Good Looks Like

- 01 — Start with high-friction, rules-based workflows
- 02 — Treat every AI output as a draft, not a final product
- 03 — Library-led governance matters more than the tool
- 04 — Introduce gradually; confidence comes before scale
- 05 — AI shifts where effort goes, not who is responsible

Start narrow. Learn fast. Expand deliberately.

Image courtesy of Emerging Strategy



Enabling librarians to be librarians

The experiences of these libraries suggest that the most compelling case for AI is the opportunity to redirect professional effort toward higher-value work.

AI can create reading-list drafts, generate metadata suggestions and process information at a scale that would be difficult to achieve manually. What it cannot do is replace the contextual knowledge, judgment and accountability that librarians bring to every workflow.

As Niv said: “Our role doesn’t really change. We still do the same things, but quicker.”

That may be the clearest lesson from these early adopters. The value of AI is allowing librarians to do more of the work that only librarians can do.

Curious to see it in action?

Request your personalized Alma or Leganto demo and get a guided walkthrough with one of our library specialists. [Get in touch here.](#)

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[AI in practice: How Academic Libraries Are Transforming Core Workflows](#), Webinar.

[Clarivate, Pulse of the Library 2025](#), report.

[Emerging Strategy, Academic AI Impact Study](#), report.

