

The California State University System — Consortial Success with the Alma Library Platform

Background and Structure

The California State University (CSU) consists of 23 campuses, each a four-year institution ranging in size from just over 900 students to nearly 43,000 students. Systemwide Digital Library Services at the CSU Office of the Chancellor oversees library technology projects across the system, and includes three full-time staff who manage the system's suite of Ex Libris products, known collectively as the Unified Library Management System (ULMS). They work in collaboration with over 70 library staff members across the campuses who participate in the various committees and task forces that govern the ULMS under the leadership of the Council of Library Deans.

From independence to shared system

Before Alma, each campus operated its own library system with separate policies and workflows. This independence created inefficiencies and limited opportunities for collaboration. The move to Alma required the campuses to agree on unified policies and shared implementations, laying the groundwork for greater consistency across the consortium.

Governance and collaboration

The consortium has developed a strong governance model. Proposals and changes are discussed within committees and, depending on the issue, voted on either by committee members or the library deans. In many cases, expert committees are entrusted with decision-making, and their recommendations are broadly adopted across the system. This structure ensures efficiency, trust, and accountability.

Looking ahead

CSU continues to centralize as much as possible in order to save libraries time, money, and training effort. When new Alma features or implementations arise, the central office often manages them directly, sparing individual campuses from duplicating work.

Advice for fellow consortia

By fostering connections and shared expertise, CSU has demonstrated how collaboration — both within its own campuses and across the broader Alma community — strengthens libraries, reduces duplication of effort, and ensures sustainable growth. Their journey underscores the power of collective problem-solving and a unified vision to achieve systemwide success.

The CSU consortium encourages other Alma consortia to join the ELUNA Consortial Community of Practice (CCOP), a valuable forum for learning, collaboration, and support among consortia. As the administrator put it:

“It is a great way to work with other consortia and learn you are not alone.”

Christina L. Hennessey Director, Unified Library Management System

Conclusion

The California State University System's journey with Alma shows how collaboration and clear governance can turn a group of independent libraries into a unified, efficient consortium. By sharing expertise and embracing a common vision, CSU has built a model for sustainable growth and innovation—proving that collective effort drives greater impact than any campus could achieve alone.

About Ex Libris, part of Clarivate

Ex Libris, part of Clarivate, is a leading global provider of cloud-based solutions that enable institutions and their users to create, manage, and share knowledge. In close collaboration with its customers and the broader community, Ex Libris develops solutions that increase library productivity, maximize the impact of research activities, enhance teaching and learning, and drive student mobile engagement. Ex Libris serves over 7,500 customers in 90 countries. For more information, see our [website](#) and join us on [LinkedIn](#), [YouTube](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#).



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