

## Editorial

This special issue highlights research taking place on and about academic libraries. The role of libraries in research and higher education is evolving, adapting to the rapidly changing needs of the communities they serve. Library services are being innovated to reach out with relevant knowledge and resources at the right time. All three research papers in this issue are case studies focusing on the academic library's contribution to the integration of students in academic life, preparation of students for scholarly discourse and digital literacy training. They all show how libraries are taking responsibility for first generation students by creating communities for their development of the tacit knowledge of the academic world or embedding literacy training in university courses.

In addition to research papers, this issue of NJLIS includes contributions in the format practice papers. In our experience, the innovation and development happening in the practice field does not always fit the format of a research paper. Nonetheless we find that in the context of academic libraries, describing the progress of practice through cases and narratives is both interesting and relevant to the community of library and information specialists. Including practice papers has allowed for the presentation, on their own terms, of development projects in research libraries that do not have the form or format of research.

Although there are library and information studies departments with strong research environments in all the Nordic countries, as well as some research on libraries in other disciplines and in the academic libraries themselves, it can be argued that relatively little research focusing specifically on academic libraries has been conducted in this part of the world, and that what exists covers a variety of issues. If we broaden the perspective to topics of relevance to academic libraries, but not directly linked to the academic library as an organization or space, such as bibliometric studies (allocation of funding, publication patterns, etc.); students' and researchers' information literacy and information seeking; and researchers' research data management, we find more developed research programs, including some fairly recent dissertations (e.g. Dahlqvist, 2024; Dutoit, 2022; Gullbekk, 2021; Hanell, 2019; Kvale, 2022). However, in this special issue, and in the editorial in particular, we focus on the academic library and the work being carried out in and by them.

While working on this special issue, we have conducted an unstructured search for Nordic research on academic libraries, using keywords such as "academic librar\*" and "university librar\*" (and equivalents in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish) in Swepub (Sweden), Cristin (Norway), Oria (Norway), Research.fi (Finland), Research Portal Denmark and IRIS (Iceland) for the past ten to fifteen years and

limited to what is recorded as peer reviewed or research publications. We find the Nordic literature on (and in) academic libraries to be scattered or, more positively phrased, broad. Our review indicates some 180 publications from 2010 onwards, but this is not a complete collection. The publication channels are also varied, with articles in international and Nordic research journals and professional journals, book chapters and conference proceedings. Many publications are of the type we have termed practice papers in this issue, with descriptions of initiatives and innovations explored at academic libraries. Authors include researchers and PhD candidates in library and information science but also, in a few cases, in other disciplines, as well as librarians and library directors. These are just among the authors whose affiliation we recognized or could identify. Below we attempt to sketch the recent Nordic literature on academic libraries based on these searches, acknowledging that we paint an incomplete picture and that important delimitations have been made, especially with regards to the research programs mentioned above.

Some anthologies primarily aimed at students in LIS but with an intended audience stretching to researchers and practicing librarians have been published over the years. One example is the recent *Stöd för forskning och utbildning: Lärosätesbiblioteken i Sverige* [Research and education support: Academic libraries in Sweden] (Gilbert & Michnik, 2024) which is reviewed in this issue by Karolina Lindh. Earlier examples are *Det åpne bibliotek: Forskningsbibliotek i endring* [The open library: Research libraries in transition] (Anderson et al., 2017) and *Viden i spil: Forskningsbibliotekers funktioner i forandring* [Knowledge at play: The transformation of the functions of research libraries] (Høytrup et al., 2012). The latter has a focus on how the digital information environments influence the development of academic libraries. Their prediction is that the future services of the academic library will be less reliant on the library as place/space. This in fact seems to be contradicted by the articles in this NJLIS issue (as well as in *Det åpne bibliotek*), which in many cases describe activities taking place in the physical library (reading groups, language cafés). A broad view of libraries is presented in an edited volume that was the result of a collaboration between university libraries in Finland and Namibia, *Empowering people* (Iivonen et al., 2012). It contains chapters on many of the topics that will be outlined below, from strategic competence management via methods for collection management, to university presses.

Our review shows that one body of literature addresses management or organizational issues in academic libraries. This includes case studies from libraries that have implemented strategic planning activities (Carlsson, 2016) and design thinking methods in a renovation project (Haglund, 2020), but also investigations of how library managers learn through computational artefacts (Chatzipanagiotou et al., 2025), library leaders' views on New Public Management's impact on information literacy training needs (Düren et al., 2019), library directors' use of statistics in library operations (Saarti et al., 2020), and the complexities of digitalization and digital innovation in academic libraries (Kurti & Miranda, 2024). Related to this are articles that investigate experiences of joint academic libraries in Finland (Palonen et al., 2014; Rintamäki et al., 2018) and the merger of libraries as part of university mergers in Rwanda (Uwamwezi, 2020) and in Finland (Juntunen et al., 2013; Muhonen et al., 2011). Another international example is from Chile, where the consequences of standardization in academic library operations were investigated from the perspective of management and librarians (Pilerot et al., 2024).

Forms of collaboration between the library and university faculty have been studied in a few case studies as well as more theoretically. Some studies discuss this in terms of embedded librarianship (Bech-Hanssen et al., 2024; Jädefrid & De Fine Licht, 2024; Kaatrakoski & Lahikainen, 2016). Related to this focus on collaboration is also an interview study of how academic librarians and university teachers can collaborate to support students' development of information literacy (Friedrichsen & Meyer, 2021). This strand of studies has topical affinities with Hartvig and Moring's article in this issue.

Other case studies describe the work with designing and carrying out courses arranged by the academic library in collaboration with other university units, notably units for academic writing (Almlie, 2020; Ejdebäck & Wickenberg, 2021, 2022; Jorum & Eklund Heinonen, 2014; M. Olsson & Bindler, 2016; Straume, 2017; Sverre et al., 2022). Here, too, we see some topical similarities with the article by Henriksen and Johnston on academic language cafés in this issue. Many, though not all, of the courses described have a particular focus on students with another first language than the language of study or on first-generation university students.

Studies that have a specific focus on the users of academic libraries, rather than on students' and researchers' information seeking and use as part of the academic context, have addressed methods for studying library use as well as the reference interview. For instance, a survey of which methods the LIBER libraries use for gaining a better understanding of their users indicated that surveys but also UX and similar tools were used (Carlsson & Torngrén, 2020). As examples of this, Fredriksson (2020) described the use of a survey as a tool to better understand how students value the library's study spaces and Lehto et al. (2012) used surveys and monitoring to study how library visitors make use of the library premises. One article suggests that identifying customer value propositions can be a way to better understand the library users and thus serve as input for development of the library's services (Niemi-Grundström, 2021). When it comes to reference interviews, this has been studied to understand what type of inquiries were made at the physical reference desk in an academic library and to what degree librarians initiated a reference interview (Bøyum et al., 2021) as well as the potential of screen sharing in digital reference interviews (Sundgaard & Sandvik, 2024). A small interview study with doctoral students in Denmark identified which factors they thought had supported or hindered their studies and identified an interest in increased library initiatives for doctoral students (Bredahl et al., 2016). There are many studies of the information literacies of students in higher education institutions, but most have a broader focus than specifically the academic library. An exception is the analysis of a Finnish information literacy recommendation through the lens of activity theory and Greimas' actantial model (Kämäräinen & Saarti, 2013).

A focus on the academic library's support for researchers can be identified as a topic of study, often with an interest in the library's and the librarians' role. In her doctoral dissertation, Eklund (2022) studied how academic librarians negotiated their professional jurisdiction when providing library services. In a series of studies, Hansson and colleagues have investigated the role of the librarians in supporting researchers' publishing activities (Hansson & Johannesson, 2013; Johannesson & Hansson, 2012) and in bibliometric work where the academic librarians' services for researchers, on the one hand, and for university management on the other, may be put to a test (Åström & Hansson, 2013). Nolin (2012, 2013) identified new tasks for the library's researcher support, which may lead to a different relationship between researchers and librarians. An example of these types of tasks is a case study of how researchers used social media for research communication and how a library took steps to support and encourage this use (Persson & Svenningsson, 2017). Lassi et al. (2016), on the other hand, investigated what support researchers needed with research data management as part of developing the library's RDM services. The development of RDM courses for researchers is also described by Kvale and Stangeland (2017).

Associated with the investigations of how libraries support publishing activities are studies of libraries' work to support open access. For instance, (L. Olsson, Francke, et al., 2020) reported on the experiences of and author response to the first Swedish Read & Publish agreement (with Springer) and to the cancellation of the Bibsam license agreement with Elsevier in 2018 because they would not accept open access as part of the terms (L. Olsson, Hertil Lindelöw, et al., 2020b, 2020a). Francke and colleagues (2017) addressed the issue of long-term preservation of deposited files in the

institutional repositories managed by Swedish academic libraries and found that many repositories lacked long-term plans and were primarily focusing on providing access in the short-term perspective. Library collections are discussed in a few publications, many of them with authors from Finnish academic libraries. Saarti et al. (2017) looked into collection policies of Finnish academic libraries, the issue of collection preservation was discussed in Muhonen et al. (2010), and Saarti (2018) calls for new collections policies in a publication landscape that is characterized by open access, machine learning techniques, a need for preserving born-digital scholarly work, and still contains physical collections. In his dissertation in economic history, Dellstig (2020) used university library acquisition, especially of bundled journal subscriptions, as a case to understand the value of academic publications. A number of publications focus on collections of non-European origin and challenges and possibilities associated with them. Schmidt (2020) highlighted the fact that despite an increasingly digital and global scholarly publishing environment, there are severe difficulties with finding and accessing non-European and non-North American literature in the databases and collections of European academic libraries. She exemplified this with South-East African research in the social sciences and humanities. An example of how collections of images produced as part of field work in South-East Asia and Oceania have been digitized and made available beyond the university and beyond Norway through the University of Oslo's use of the Alvin database is described by Anderson (2024). Also, at the University of Oslo, the development and items of the university's papyrus collection is described by Maravela (2024). Digitization of indigenous and local knowledge by Thai university libraries is the topic of Johansson and Nonthacumjane's (2022) article which investigates the issue in light of culturally responsive and responsible representation. Digitization of cultural heritage items is also in focus for Martinez' (2024) dissertation on the role of library staff in digitization projects associated with digital textual scholarship.

Some studies address issues concerned with knowledge organization in academic libraries. The topics span cataloguing rules for early printed books (Sjökqvist, 2016), a comparison between Google Scholar and a university's discovery system (Karlsson, 2014), the ISKO working group on guidelines for the procurement of library management systems (Haynes et al., 2024), and an overview of the history of online searching (Jensen et al., 2020).

We found relatively few studies published so far of the quickly evolving research area of AI in academic libraries. Academic librarians made up the majority of the participants in the learning circle on AI and libraries studied by Andersdotter (2023) which functioned as a method for professional development. An important issue discussed in the groups concerned how AI may influence the publics' trust in libraries and librarians. Kautonen and Gasparini (2024) propose a model inspired by design thinking for addressing competency building around AI in academic libraries in ways that try to capture the complexities of the issue. On the topic of competency building, it seems appropriate to end this review with Pilerot and Lindberg's (2018) ethnographic study of academic librarians' professional development, which has a broader perspective than AI. The authors conclude that the librarians learn from a varied set of sources rather than sticking strictly to reported research findings, as would be in line with a strict evidence-based approach. Academic librarians thus have a wide set of structured and unstructured methods for broadening their understanding of the field and of their work tasks.

This issue contains both research papers and practice-oriented pieces. The three research papers all focus on students and the work by librarians. Training of students through reading groups, as described by Andrén, and academic language cafes, as investigated by Henriksen and Johnston, are both examples of how research libraries are re-defining their services. Both Andrén and Henriksen and Johnston use the concept of the library as space and place for development of social capital (Vårheim, 2007) in an academic library context. With a focus on the users, the students, the libraries

explore their collections and their space in the creation of learning environments. In both cases, texts are used as entry points for discussions, reflections and community development.

Andrén describes how organized reading groups for reading and discussing fiction develops the students' perspectives and experiences. The article expands our understanding of how academic libraries in Sweden promote social reading with reflections on education and the students' future profession in focus. At the language cafes studied by Henriksen and Johnston, the students can bring coursework and they can discuss and get feedback on academic writing in their second language. Through the informal learning environment of language cafes, the library prepares the students for mastering their second language in their studies and in professional life after their studies.

Hartvig and Moring explore digital literacy teaching and different ways of embedding such teaching in university courses. They find that in the example courses they study, disciplinary perspectives are not prioritised. They introduce the concepts practical and epistemological embeddedness to describe the different approaches to embedding digital literacy training in the student's educational programs. As the same library staff is responsible for teaching students from multiple faculties, the content delivered is often of a general nature, illustrating practical embeddedness. Still, they argue, prioritizing epistemological embeddedness, where students are presented with domain-relevant content, is important for preparing the students with digital literacy skills relevant beyond the academic context.

The issue also contains four practice papers, focusing on developing services concerned with issues currently much discussed in academic libraries, such as AI, copyright, digital scholarship and research data management, and information literacy instruction. Hammarbäck, Sjöblom, Viklund and Hessman analyse doctoral students' reactions to the integration of AI tools in a PhD course on information literacy. They identify enthusiasm along with anxiety and distrust. The case shows the importance of integrating new tools in information literacy training while also reflecting on the possibilities and challenges that AI tools represent. The authors conclude by calling for further research on the practical application of generative AI in research.

Österåker and Nilsson's contribution describes the development of an open online course at Umeå University, Sweden, focused on publishing research under creative commons licences. They present their experiences with producing open educational resources and identify a knowledge gap among researchers when it comes to the licensing of their scholarly output, which is important to consider in the transition to open science.

Good and Kvale, in line with the previous two papers, also highlight an innovative approach to research support currently taking place in research libraries. In their paper, experiences from and remaining challenges in the development of the Digital Scholarship Centre at the University of Oslo, Norway, are presented. The Digital Scholarship Centre coordinates training, advice and network-building related to digital-skills development. As such, the Centre crosses disciplinary boundaries both at the university and the university library with a focus on skills, tools and methods which are used across domains.

Reflecting on the need for library staff to apply pedagogical methods in teaching and on the challenge of motivating and making the teaching relevant for the students, Schriver and Slyngborg describe the development of a teaching material on information literacy from the perspective of critical source consciousness.

All four practice papers present different approaches to education and skills development for the primary users of academic libraries. As practice papers they do not report on research, but rather describe projects all aiming to improve and innovate library services. As editors with a background from both research and the practice domain we believe that practice papers is a format that can contribute to bridging the gap between theory and practice. This special issue received a number of contributions from practicing librarians, which we take to indicate substantial interest within the practice domain to share experiences from the work conducted in academic libraries. The approach and objectives of projects, time available and the authors' training and experience can form hindrances for describing this work in the form of a research paper, but the practice-oriented format can allow for much important knowledge to be shared. By encouraging academic librarians to write about their development work and perhaps further explore the theory of their field, and at the same time inspire LIS researchers to conduct more research on academic libraries, the services they offer and the transformations they are undergoing, we hope to see a continually growing body of literature of varying types on academic libraries in the Nordic countries.

In the book review section, Karolina Lindh contributes a review of *Stöd för forskning och utbildning: Lärosätesbiblioteken i Sverige* [Research and education support: Academic libraries in Sweden], an anthology of 18 chapters describing different aspects of services provided in academic libraries. In her review, Lindh touches upon the distinction between research and practice texts, the anthology being an example of the latter. Several contributors have backgrounds from research and they apply and reflect on their research experience in their library work. The chapters can be read independently, and the review also functions as a guide to readers on which chapters are relevant to their needs and interests. The book as a whole provides LIS students with a comprehensive introduction to academic libraries from a service perspective.

As guest editors of this thematic issue, we are grateful to all authors who submitted manuscripts, to the reviewers who contributed with detailed reviews and constructive comments, and to the editors-in-chief of NJLIS during the time of production of the issue, Kim Tøllerås, Sunniva Evjen, Jenny Lindberg and J. Tuomas Harviainen, for facilitating this special issue dedicated to academic libraries.

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Guest editors

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