

SMU LIBRARIES

FALL 2025 NEWSLETTER

HUMAN-POWERED AI

Students and faculty rely on librarians to find and use artificial intelligence tools that elevate teaching, learning and research

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ON THE COVER

As the information ecosystem grows more complex, SMU Libraries remains at the forefront of digital information literacy. Librarians guide users in navigating new research tools while cultivating the human skills that give technology true value.

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LETTER FROM THE DEAN

We're the hearts and minds driving AI

Our fall newsletter theme is “Human-Powered AI.” In reality, all artificial intelligence is human intelligence. The material that generative AI tools draw from is human-created knowledge. It is the sum of our collective expressions through literature, opinions, music, art, math, science, humor, philosophy, religion and more.

How we design and use AI systems is a human choice. What we automate, replicate and build through our interactions with AI represents the next leap in assistive technology. AI extends our abilities. It reflects what is possible when human imagination meets computational power.

While science fiction may imagine sentient machines, today AI is still a tool to be learned, practiced and refined. Like a tennis racket or a paintbrush, it takes time to master the implement to fit the purpose. When used ethically and thoughtfully, it helps us reach farther, think deeper and create more freely.

Learning any new tool begins with curiosity. It grows through collaboration, experimentation and shared insight. In these pages, we invite you to see how our librarians are engaging in that same process – exploring new ideas, building partnerships and testing how AI can enrich research and learning.

We are a launchpad for exploration grounded in critical thinking and trusted information (see Page 3). We work with faculty to design and evaluate tools that enhance teaching and discovery (see Pages 4–5). We sustain digital resources that propel research (see Page 6) and welcome new archivists who preserve and share the primary sources that form the bedrock of human knowledge and, ultimately, of AI itself (see Pages 7–8).

At SMU Libraries, we see ourselves as connectors, creators and partners in the AI journey. We are information professionals working where integrity meets innovation, ensuring that technology remains guided by human purpose. As Kaitlin Siebert reminds us (see Page 8), “history lives best when it’s used.”

AI is the ultimate human-powered tool, and we remain committed to our roots, keeping human expression and creativity at the center as we shape this technology to extend our collective reach.

Holly E. Jeffcoat
Dean of SMU Libraries

“

In these pages, we invite you to see how our librarians are exploring new ideas, building partnerships and testing how AI can enrich research and learning.”



Above The fall ushered in a flurry of AI initiatives and the next chapter in Hilltop history. SMU Libraries Dean Holly E. Jeffcoat (center) joined the University in welcoming new President Jay C. Hartzell (left) and Executive Vice President and Provost Rachel Davis Mersey. **Left** Even in the age of AI, nothing compares to the analog delights of Homecoming with these precious little ponies (see Page 16).

EMPOWERING RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP IN THE AGE OF AI

Artificial intelligence is transforming how students and scholars discover, analyze and create knowledge. This evolution aligns seamlessly with the enduring mission of SMU Libraries: to help the academic community cut through the noise and access resources that are reliable, relevant and verifiable.

As the learning landscape grows more complex, SMU Libraries remains at the forefront of digital information literacy. Librarians guide students in navigating new research tools while cultivating the human skills of critical thinking, discernment and ethical reasoning that give technology true value (see Page 3). They're also engaged in research through participation in such projects as the national study on AI literacy run by Ithaka S+R.

AI now plays a visible role throughout the libraries, driven by a comprehensive education and awareness campaign crafted by the Academic Initiatives Steering Committee. Infographics, digital signs, videos and social media posts share practical tips and promote workshops that help the campus community use AI responsibly and effectively.

Librarians take the lead in carefully assessing AI tools by testing emerging platforms for accuracy, transparency and data privacy. Their work provides researchers with confidence that innovation is grounded

in academic integrity.

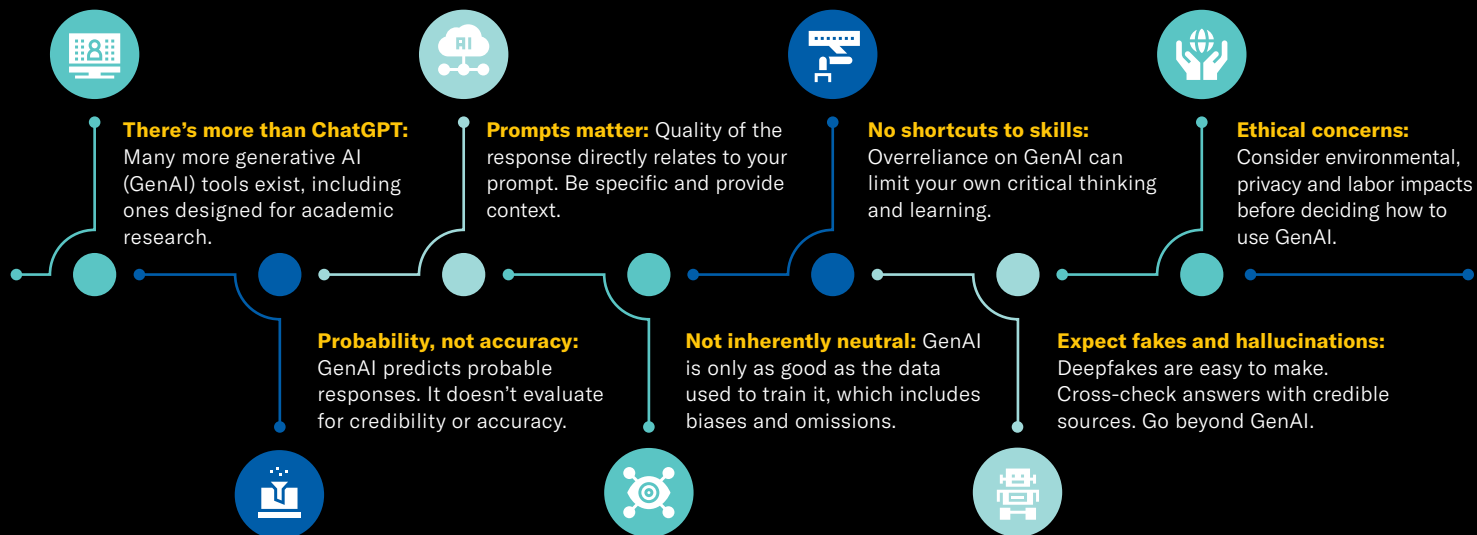
They also collaborate closely with students and faculty to integrate AI thoughtfully into research and teaching. Through tailored consultations, courses, faculty partnerships and specialized instruction, they teach strategies for maintaining scholarly rigor in the digital environment (see Page 4).

SMU Libraries also offers a robust array of workshops, hands-on research opportunities and 24/7 support for those seeking assistance with AI tools or research questions.

Even in an era defined by automation, human insight remains irreplaceable. The intellectual curiosity, creativity and collaboration that librarians nurture across disciplines are what transform information into understanding. By pairing new technology with expert guidance, SMU Libraries empowers the campus community to use AI as a means of discovery rather than distraction (see Page 5).

In a world saturated with data, SMU Libraries continues to serve as an essential partner in bridging human intellect and technological progress. AI may accelerate research, but it is the discernment and expertise of librarians that sustain the rigor, ethics and depth that define true academic inquiry. ■

7 TIPS FOR GENERATIVE AI



Reading, writing and AI

Librarians emphasize human brainpower in a new course helping students navigate the newest frontier of digital research

With artificial intelligence tools advancing at a dizzying pace, SMU librarians take their information literacy expertise into the classroom to assist students in thoughtfully evaluating sources and developing efficient research strategies.

For example, Julia Anderson (left photo), social science research librarian, and Megan Heuer (right photo), director of educational initiatives for SMU Libraries, team up in the spring to teach Information Systems and Society, a course they developed together.

"Our course covers a lot of different technologies, but we have taken particular care to make investigating how AI works, how it influences knowing, and how it impacts information a fundamental part of student learning," Anderson says.

"Students naturally have many questions about AI, so by integrating AI literacy into our course, we're able to prepare students for their academic future and beyond."

Heuer finds that most students use AI, but they don't always grasp how it works.

"They oftentimes use it as a survival strategy for understanding course content," she says. "Many were surprised that AI doesn't actually evaluate the information it gives. They also didn't know the potential biases that AI can have."

Students also tend to embrace opportunities to use AI without fully contemplating its risks.

"I was surprised that students are aware that generative AI is changing what they're doing academically, but they're not exactly sure how," Anderson says. "While they acknowledge that it changes the way they study, read and write, they didn't connect that to critical thinking itself. This opened up the space for more conversation on the topic."

To activate and strengthen critical-thinking skills, assignments require students to use and analyze AI research tools. They're asked to identify embedded biases; think about how they verify or evaluate responses; ponder the value of finding individual information

sources, rather than relying on AI; and answer other probing questions.

By the end of the course, students become more informed users of AI, and the librarians gain new information to shape future instruction.

"This work of AI literacy is so important in this moment of rapid transition for our students," Heuer says. "As they start to turn to AI as their primary information tool, we have to adapt our information literacy instruction to meet the need to understand how AI works, how it can make research easier, and where it fails." ■



AI HELP AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

Here's a sampling of the multitude of resources always available to support students, faculty and other library users with AI-related questions:

Ask Us: Connect with SMU Libraries staff through online chat, email, text or phone to get people-powered answers for library and research questions. smu.edu/libraries/help/ask-us

Canvas tutorials: Modules cover a wide variety of topics related to scholarship and research. They include these AI-focused titles: Introduction to Generative AI, Thinking Critically about Generative AI and What Do We Mean by AI? guides.smu.edu/tutorials

Online resources: The AI Resources at SMU guide is a one-stop hub for developing a basic understanding about the mechanics and tools of generative AI, as well as information about SMU's high-performance computing options. guides.smu.edu/ai

Subject librarians: When research demands deep expertise and a human touch, there's no substitute for subject librarians. Visit the Meet with a Librarian page to view the roster of subject librarians, make an appointment for a consultation or find contact information. smu.edu/libraries/help/meet

Workshops: Check out the SMU Libraries homepage, keep an eye on social channels and read the new Research and Teaching newsletter for information on workshops such as AI for College led by Julia Anderson.

AI and academia

New initiative fosters faculty collaboration to test and adopt emerging research tools

When the spring semester ended, Cox School of Business’ Amar Gande set a goal “to become proficient with commonly used AI tools during the summer.”

SMU Libraries’ new AI for Research Cohort became the launchpad for Gande’s exploration. Led by Carrie Johnston, director of research and scholarly initiatives for the Libraries, the interdisciplinary group of 13 faculty members tested artificial intelligence tools and evaluated their potential for research and teaching. Cohort members were asked to perform research in their fields using Elicit and Undermind, tools designed to speed through the review of scholarly materials at a superhuman pace. They also were free to experiment with such common AI tools as ChatGPT, which deploys a generative pretrained transformer (GPT) to produce text, speech and images based on user prompts. During periodic

associate professor of finance, had accomplished his goal and tailored his own AI tool kit in the process. “While the AI tools that I tested (i.e., ChatGPT, Perplexity, Elicit, NotebookLM, etc.) were not good in *screening* (i.e., identifying relevant articles), they did a superb job in *summarizing* information from a curated collection of relevant papers in a fraction of the time that it would take to do so manually,” he explains. “As a result, I now use these AI tools daily for both my research and teaching.” Likewise, Jeanna R. Wieselmann, assistant professor of STEM education in the Simmons School of Education and Human Development, appreciates the impact her new understanding of AI’s potential will have on her roles as a researcher and a mentor. “My firsthand insights into the affordances and limitations of these tools have made me a more critical consumer of AI tools and



“Thanks to the expertise of our faculty researchers, I’ve discovered ways that AI can amplify our already robust research methods and shape best practices for critically evaluating these tools across disciplines.”

Carrie Johnston

Zoom sessions, the group compared notes. The cohort’s findings will be shared in a white paper to benefit colleagues across the academic spectrum. It will be published in SMU Scholar digital repository. Participants represented engineering, law, psychology, world languages and other fields, so they approached the study from varying perspectives, enriching the experience for them – and Johnston. “Faculty partnerships are incredibly valuable, especially in the dynamic landscape of AI, because no single tool works for every discipline,” she says. “Thanks to the expertise of our faculty researchers, I’ve discovered ways that AI can amplify our already robust research methods and shape best practices for critically evaluating these tools across disciplines.” By the time the training ended in July, Gande,

reports, and I am now better equipped to guide my Ph.D. students in navigating AI thoughtfully.” For Ömer Özak, associate professor of economics in Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences, “the experience was so enlightening and fun, that now I’m organizing an Econ AI cohort this year to share these methods more broadly with colleagues and students. My goal is to build on the momentum from the summer program by creating a space where we can keep exploring, learning from each other, and applying AI tools in meaningful and practical ways.” Faculty may apply for the AI for Research Stipend through May 1, 2026, here: smu.edu/libraries/ai-stipend



Amar Gande



Ömer Özak



Jeanna R. Wieselmann

LAUNCHING A NEW FACULTY COHORT TO STUDY AI INSTRUCTION

To build on the momentum generated by his previous collaboration, Constantin Icleanu was among the first to apply for a new \$1,000 stipend launched recently by SMU Libraries. It is earmarked for instructors interested in redesigning a research assignment to address concerns about AI or to integrate AI tools into the research process.

Director of Educational Initiatives Megan Heuer designed the new AI and Research Assignments Cohort to bring together stipend recipients from multiple disciplines to explore how to promote student learning and research skills in their spring courses. The group will build strategies for teaching AI literacy, help students understand the appropriate use of AI in research, and ensure students develop critical thinking and reading skills.

“I see the AI cohort as an invaluable opportunity to gain guidance, share strategies, and collaborate on best practices for walking this fine line between innovation and rigor in teaching and research,” Icleanu says.

The faculty cohort will meet in December to brainstorm and learn about AI literacy and SMU Libraries’ services. They will implement their strategies during the spring semester and share the results in May. Their findings will be reported in a white paper published in the SMU Scholar institutional repository.

Strengthening AI literacy and ethical engagement

Faculty find a trusted academic partner in SMU Libraries, where resources, expertise and support align to help them innovate in research and enhance their teaching.

SMU Libraries builds on its successful frameworks for faculty collaboration, such as the Research Assignment Stipend, to adapt information literacy and instructional design for the age of AI. The program encourages professors and librarians to get creative as they embrace evolving opportunities to propel student accomplishment while guiding them to use the latest research tools effectively and honestly.

Among the spring recipients of the stipend was Constantin C. Icleanu, associate teaching professor of Spanish. Icleanu and co-instructor Denise DuPont worked with Research Librarian Rebecca Graff to actively incorporate AI tools into a final research paper assignment.

“Our motivation to apply for the stipend came from two main priorities: giving students hands-on experience with AI and helping them become stronger researchers through collaboration with library experts,” says Icleanu. “The stipend gave us the opportunity to revise the syllabus and assignment prompts to define how AI could be used, how it should be cited, and how we distinguish between responsible use and academic dishonesty.”

The plan touched on all phases of the research process, including how students pick a theme, craft an argumentative thesis, find peer-reviewed sources, draft their paper and polish the final product.

Graff met with the class twice over the semester. In one session she covered Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) AI tools. This technology extends beyond large language models by adding external data sources to produce more accurate and context-aware responses. In a second session, she focused on library databases.

“Both sessions were very helpful, enabling the students to bring more sophisticated academic articles into their research papers,” Icleanu says. Without a doubt, AI’s profound impact will continue to reverberate across the entire academic enterprise.

“Since university graduates will almost certainly

be expected to use AI tools in professional contexts, I believe faculty must lead by example and integrate discipline-specific AI applications into coursework,” Icleanu says. “By doing so, we can demonstrate how these tools can save time, spark creativity and support accuracy while also encouraging ethical, productive use.” ■



“We can demonstrate how these tools can save time, spark creativity and support accuracy while also encouraging ethical, productive use.”

Digital resources transform research and discovery

SMU Libraries’ expansive collection of databases and digital tools empowers students and faculty to explore ideas, uncover new insights and advance scholarship across disciplines. These resources not only save time but also democratize access to information, allowing anyone with curiosity and creativity to conduct meaningful research.



“
The past is full of
important stories that
haven’t been told.
They’re just out there
waiting for you to
stumble onto them.”

Tim Cassidy

Research at the speed of curiosity

Digital archives are redefining how scholars approach historical and cultural study. Tim Cassidy, associate professor of English, illustrates this shift with a striking example: “A brilliant historian once spent half a century combing through early American newspapers to compile a bibliography of reviews of Noah Webster’s dictionaries. I can now recreate

half of that work in five minutes with a single search in the Early American Newspapers database,” he says. “That speed lets me test ideas as they come to me and pursue the most promising ones.”

Cassedy’s students experience similar breakthroughs in his course The Archives Workshop. Each week, they explore digital databases to uncover forgotten stories before diving deeply into one discovery. “The results are amazing,” he says. “Students have researched everything from 1890s bicycle culture and 19th-century artists’ diaries to a forgotten Texas novelist and the first woman to run for mayor of Los Angeles.”

Transformative tools democratize access

Jill E. Kelly, associate professor of history and Altshuler Distinguished Teaching Professor, sees the digital transformation as a great equalizer. “Researchers no longer need unlimited time or funds to sit in archives

halfway around the world,” she notes. Kelly’s students in History of South Africa have even completed virtual internships with the South African NGO South African History Online, contributing to postapartheid scholarship from campus.

Experience with real-world impact

Across the campus, librarians collaborate closely with faculty to integrate resources directly into teaching and research. Megan Heber, professor of practice of arts management and nonprofit leadership in Meadows School of the Arts, praises that partnership. “Access to platforms like GuideStar and Advisory Board for the Arts lets students use the same tools professionals rely on, taking their education to the next level,” she says. “Our librarian (Naomi Schemm) has done an incredible job curating resources so that students can focus on analysis and learning, rather than spending all of their time hunting down data. That support allows them to dig deeper, ask more meaningful questions, and prepare for real-world practice in arts and nonprofit leadership.” ■

Adopting new resources: A step-by-step guide

Breanna Webb, electronic resources management librarian, and Natasha Siu, assistant director of collection development, outline the steps for bringing digital resources to life at SMU Libraries:

- Faculty identify promising tools and connect with their teaching librarian.
- Teaching librarians collaborate with the SMU Libraries collections team, coordinate trials of a resource and add the resource to our Databases A–Z list for exploration.
- Feedback is gathered via an easy online form, and with positive input and approval, the resource is featured on the list as “new.”
- Throughout the process, Teaching and Learning librarians keep faculty informed and integrate the tools into relevant research guides, ensuring researchers and faculty always have the best resources at their fingertips.

The joy of the archives: Preserving SMU’s legacy

Benjamin Jenkins brings an array of talents to his new position as University archivist. His curiosity about the past and passion for research propelled him to earn a Master of Library and Information Science from San Jose State University and a Ph.D. in history from the University of California, Riverside. He has written two books and multiple articles for peer-reviewed journals covering history and archival studies. Before joining SMU Libraries, he served as an archivist with the George W. Bush Presidential Library.

In a recent interview with Brynn Price ’23, SMU Libraries communications and engagement specialist, Jenkins discussed his role in maintaining Hilltop history.

What inspired you to become an archivist?

That’s a good question. When I was an undergraduate, one of my professors was an archivist at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library in Southern California. He was actually on a close, first-name basis with Ronald Reagan, and he helped to organize the Reagan library. He invited me to intern at the Nixon library, and there I fell in love with archives, preserving historical documents and making them accessible, often through putting them out into the digital world. I have been an archivist professionally for about 10 years now.

What brought you to SMU?

I’m impressed by the history and culture and by the fact that it is thriving, expertly navigating the challenges facing universities. The collections team is fantastic. I enjoy working with Russell Martin, Christina Wood, Terre Heydari, Cynthia Franco, Joel Eatmon and Kaitlin Siebert at DeGolyer Library. We function well together in preserving SMU history.

What does a day in the archives look like for you?

There’s such a wide variety of things that you can be doing in this profession. This week, a



Left Benjamin Jenkins recently joined SMU Libraries as University archivist. Above In celebration of the inauguration of President Jay C. Hartzell, Jenkins curated *Leading the Mustang Legacy: The Presidents of SMU*, with selections from the SMU Archives, including the photo above of Robert Hyer (right), SMU’s first president, at the inauguration of SMU’s third president, Charles Selecman, in 1923.



typical day is creating a finding aid, essentially a guide to a collection. Another day, I might

dig into a collection that hasn’t been processed before and organize materials. We get many inquiries from people who are interested in sports footage, knowing family graduation dates and other genealogical inquiries like that. The day-to-day is split between the public-facing activities – meeting with people, answering reference requests, talking with classes when they visit DeGolyer – and the backstage work of processing and making the collections findable.

You recently curated *Leading the Mustang Legacy: The Presidents of SMU* for the SMU presidential inauguration. Were there any interesting stories you uncovered while researching?

My favorite thing I learned during this exhibit

was that these guys all talked to each other. They were pretty good friends, on a first-name basis. They corresponded frequently; they would give each other copies of books. So that was an interesting, sort of fun fact to learn. It was almost a fraternity of former SMU presidents who kept in touch with each other.

What do you enjoy most about working with SMU’s history and community?

I love touching files nobody has looked at in years and processing materials that often haven’t seen the light of day. I take them to students and faculty and say, “Look at this amazing stuff that we have. It could be useful to you in the classroom.” That, to me, is the joy of archiving: taking resources that have been locked away and making them accessible, whether through visits to DeGolyer, digitization or curating exhibits showcasing SMU’s story. ■

Meet Kaitlin Siebert: A forever-learner in the ‘purr-fect’ profession

Kaitlin Siebert celebrated International Cat Day with a blog post that took readers through a step-by-step explanation of her online search for cats in SMU’s digital collections. The humor-laced tutorial captures the curiosity, creativity and expertise Siebert brings to her new role as DeGolyer Library’s public services librarian.

Although Siebert admits it took her a while to realize that librarianship was a natural fit, she’s now thriving in a profession that unites her passions for science, culture, education and civic engagement.

“I’ve always been fascinated by the hidden systems that shape our world,” she says. “Libraries and archives reveal those systems in the most tangible way, through the records people leave behind.”

She credits the late Jalesia Horton, a fellow biology enthusiast who served as director of Access Services and Resource Sharing for SMU Libraries, for steering her in the right direction. “Jalesia told me I could become an academic librarian and keep learning forever,” she recalls. “I remember glancing at her three framed degrees and thinking, ‘That sounds like a dream.’”

Within six months, Siebert enrolled at the University of North Texas, where she earned a Master of Science in library science and a certificate in archival management. She has since become a certified archivist through the Academy of Certified Archivists.

The 2025 Jalesia Horton Memorial Library School Scholarship, awarded by Friends of SMU Libraries, helped support her graduate studies. “Jalesia was a close colleague and mentor. It means a great deal to receive a scholarship named in her honor,” Siebert says. “She inspired me to become a librarian and even wrote my recommendation letter for graduate school.”

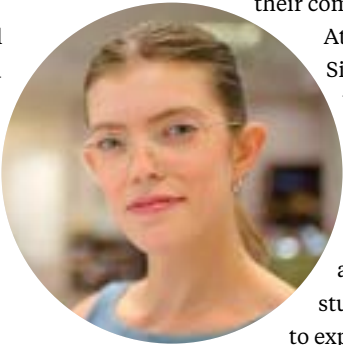
Siebert joined SMU Libraries in 2022 as a temporary worker at Fondren Library. Those early mornings at the front desk – helping students locate books, answering questions and managing course reserves – shaped her view that a library is a living, evolving space. “Libraries adapt,” she says. “They breathe with the people who use them.”

In 2023, she became patron resource coordinator. Among the projects she led was a

collaboration with students to curate artwork displayed in Fondren Library. The initiative invited students to engage directly with SMU’s special collections and empowered them to influence how their library reflects their community.

At DeGolyer Library, Siebert continues to blend scholarship with public service. Each day brings a new archival adventure, everything from assisting researchers studying Freedman towns, to exploring rare texts, to fielding questions about the JFK assassination. “It’s never dull,” she says. “Each inquiry reminds me that history lives best when it’s used.”

Perhaps her greatest motivation lies in helping the public realize that libraries, archives and museums belong to them. “These spaces aren’t storage units,” she explains. “They’re civic commons, places where knowledge is preserved so it can be shared.” ■



Above An online exhibit of feline images included this cowgirl with her pig, cat and dog. **Right** Another postcard featured the facetious caption, “Something on my mind.”



REES-JONES COLLECTION



An expansive view of gold rush history

If not for the artistic talents of Charles B. Gillespie, his name, like those of thousands who left the eastern United States in the 1840s to seek gold in California, might have been relegated to family lore and relative obscurity.

A trove of his sketches, paintings and writings remained a source of family pride for generations, finally landing in the Bowling Green, Ohio, home of Dick Rogers, his great-great-grandson. In 2008, when Rogers decided to part with the heirlooms, the news started a rush among historians eager to see and study one of the most important California gold rush archives to surface in a century. In fact, the story was covered by the Associated Press and made headlines across the nation.

Today, the large assemblage of Gillespie’s original manuscripts, artwork and related materials documenting his westward journey, his days in the gold fields, his Civil War service and his post-war life is a part of the Rees-Jones Collection.

The Gillespie collection consists of five oil paintings, 165 sketches and a sketchbook, four photographs, three manuscript diaries or ledgers, 14 letters, three manuscript poems, a scrapbook and an autograph literary manuscript, says archivist Christina Wood.

The archive tells a sweeping American story. Gillespie left Pennsylvania in 1841 and traveled west across the Great Plains to Colorado and along the Santa Fe Trail and the Oregon Trail, finally reaching Oregon Territory. He later participated in the California gold rush in the late 1840s.

Although he received no formal training, he was a seriously talented artist. Gillespie produced several oil paintings and many detailed sketches of scenery, towns and settlements, along with a 182-page gold rush diary, and descriptive letters. The collection also includes letters and reports describing his service as a soldier in the U.S. Army during the Civil War, as well as post-war materials about his life. He died in 1907 at age 86 after a career as a physician.

Top This oil painting depicting a herd of buffalo on the move was likely painted by Charles B. Gillespie after he returned from the West. **Above left** The Gillespie collection includes at least 165 sketches, including the famous Sutter’s Mill in Coloma, California, where James Marshall’s discovery launched the gold rush.



Studying, bonding and building community

As I made the seven-hour drive to my new school – car packed to the brim, family in tow – I wondered where I would find my friends, where my study spots would be, and how life would look in my first year. I didn’t know then that all three would somehow lead me to the library.

Coming from Memphis, Tennessee, to Dallas, I knew that starting my freshman year at SMU would come with a lot of changes. Still, I was ready for this new chapter, ready to make new friends, explore the city and figure out my future.



Learning to make friends can be a tricky process, especially in college. You don’t want to seem too eager or too distant, too enthusiastic or too reserved. For me, asking to study together became the perfect balance. I can’t count how many times I’ve texted, “Let’s meet at Fondren” or “Underwood closes at midnight if you want to go” or “Have you been to Bridwell yet? It’s very dark academia.”

Libraries have always been part of my life. Some of my best childhood memories are summer library trips, swapping books with my sister and meticulously updating my Goodreads. Maybe that’s why, when everything around me felt new, the library was the first place that felt familiar.

Looking back, the libraries defined much of my freshman year. I made some of my closest friends in the Fondren second-floor study rooms. I planned my entire Google Calendar in the first week of school, figured out how to study for my first college exam and crammed late into the night for finals in the Centennial Reading Room – far different from the girl with her color-coded Google Calendar.

I loved walking into Fondren and seeing study groups huddled around a whiteboard, naming as many biology terms as they could. I loved laughing a little too loudly with my friends in the reading room. I loved wandering Underwood during study breaks, just to stretch my legs and take a study break. Across all seven SMU libraries, I found something unexpected: a sense of community. ■

Zaheen Chowdhury ’28

Major: Health and society

Minors: Arabic and public policy and international affairs

SMU activities: President’s Scholar; member of the University Honors Program, the Muslim Student Association and the SMU Libraries

Student Advisory Board; student facilitator for the Emerging Leaders Program; conducts research in the Mental Health Equity Lab; and serves as a board member for the Texas Ramp Project through the SMU Board Fellows Program

Revealing the history and influence of the rare ‘Boerne Bible’

When National Public Radio picked up the mystery of the centuries-old “Boerne Bible,” reporters relied on the expertise of Elisa McCune to shed light on its significance.

McCune, Bridwell Library’s special collections and integrative projects librarian, investigated the background and impact of the rare artifact in *The 1614 Low German Bible of Boerne, Texas: An Examination of Its Origins and Lasting Influence in the Lives of Nineteenth Century Immigrants*, her 2012 master’s thesis for the history of the book program at the University of London.

She first encountered the 12.5-pound tome early in her career while working at the public library in Boerne, Texas. The small Hill Country

town, located about 30 miles northwest of San Antonio, was founded by German immigrants in 1849. A high school librarian found it amongst the school’s collection and handed it over to the town’s historical society. After being painstakingly preserved, it was exhibited publicly.

Only seven copies of the 411-year-old book are known to exist. “The British Library has one, there are a couple in Germany, and there’s one in Chicago, at the Newberry Library,” she says. There’s also one at the Royal Danish Library.

As McCune explains in the interview, Low German, now considered a dead language, was

spoken in the northern part of the country. High German, the dialect of the south, evolved into today’s German language. The fact that it’s printed in the vernacular, rather than in Latin, demonstrates the influence of Martin Luther and the break from Roman Catholic authority.

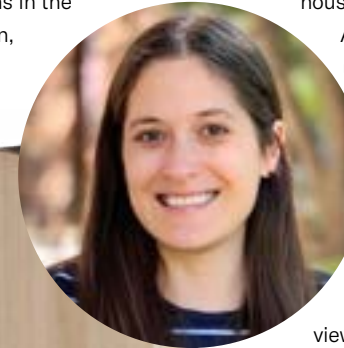
Because of its heft, the Bible, illustrated with elaborate woodcuts, was likely meant to be displayed, perhaps on a church lectern. It was produced by Hans Stern in Lüneburg, Germany, where the original plates used in 1614 are on display in the city’s library. The publishing house still exists and continues to print Bibles.

Although its path to Boerne remains unclear, the Bible’s “journey from Germany to Texas highlights the importance of printed materials in the spread of Protestantism and the Reformation’s lasting impact on immigrant communities,” McCune says.

Research will likely continue now that it has been digitized and is available for viewing online at The Portal to Texas History (texashistory.unt.edu).

McCune says she’s lucky to be able to use her knowledge about the history of the book almost every day. She started with SMU Libraries in 2014 and worked in circulation at Fondren Library and in metadata and digitization in the Norwick Center for Digital Solutions before joining the Bridwell Library staff in 2023.

“The history of the book is intrinsically bound up in the history of the Bible – books look how they look largely because of Bibles and Christianity,” she says. “We have great collections here, not only in Bibles, but in fabulous artists’ books, fine press books, manuscripts, etc., and it’s wonderful to see all of the different iterations and expressions of one of my favorite objects.”



Scan the QR code with your phone to listen to the *All Things Considered* segment featuring Elisa McCune.



Celebrating a classic by the enduring Horton Foote



Over a career that spanned more than seven decades, writer Horton Foote chronicled the moral and emotional lives of people rooted to place, haunted by memory and sustained by hope. Among his many acclaimed works, *The Trip to Bountiful* stands out as perhaps the purest expression of his Texas sensibility. It is an elegy for home, belonging and the dignity of ordinary life.

In the spring, the 40th anniversary of the cinematic adaptation of *The Trip to Bountiful* will be celebrated in a collaboration showcasing selections from DeGolyer Library’s extensive Horton Foote Collection and a screening of the award-winning movie, now a part of the G. William Jones Film and Video Collection at Hamon Arts Library.

Special Collections Librarian Cynthia Franco, DeGolyer’s resident expert on the Foote archive, will curate the exhibit featuring materials related to his filmmaking.

Foote’s writing is often described as “Southern,” yet it is distinctly Texan in texture and temperament. *The Trip to Bountiful*, first written for television in 1953, then adapted for the stage and later for the screen, distills his enduring themes in a simple story with a profound impact.

It follows Carrie Watts, an elderly widow confined to a cramped Houston apartment with her overprotective son and bossy daughter-in-law. Longing to see her hometown of Bountiful one last time before she dies, Mrs. Watts escapes on a bus journey back to the place that holds her memories and her sense of self. When she finally reaches the overgrown remains of her old home, she finds that the town has withered away, but her memories restore it to life.

The movie captures a recurring Foote motif: The essence of home resides not in buildings or landscapes, but in the persistence of memory and love.

Foote’s screenplay received an Academy Award nomination, while Geraldine Page won an Oscar for her portrayal of Carrie Watts.

Through *The Trip to Bountiful*, Foote articulates the tension between progress and nostalgia that defines much of 20th-century Texas. The encroachment of city life, the erosion of community and the quiet resilience of those who remain planted in rural settings are themes echoed through his plays and screenplays, from *Tender Mercies* to *The Orphans’ Home Cycle*.

Check social media feeds and the SMU Libraries website – smu.edu/libraries – for more information about the exhibit and screening in the spring.

A Rural Requiem: Mourning small-town decline and finding hope

Like the works of Horton Foote, new music by composer Cody Criswell-Badillo finds beauty, heartache and dignity in the ordinary lives and landscapes of rural Texas. Both artists turn their gaze toward small towns, revealing how the simplest gestures – a long road home or a familiar hymn – hold the weight of belonging and loss.

Meadows School of the Arts and the Corsicana Artist and Writer Residency will co-present the world premiere of *A Rural Requiem*; or, *The Great Silence* on Tuesday, February 17, 2026, at 7:30 p.m. in Caruth Auditorium. SMU Libraries and Clements Center for Southwest Studies at SMU will co-sponsor the performance. The 11-movement work by Criswell-Badillo, performed by the East Coast ensemble earspace under the direction of Richard Drehoff, maps the structure of a

traditional requiem onto the music and stories of rural Texas.

Drawing from Texas folk traditions, Baptist hymns, corridos and shape-note tunes, the piece unfolds as a communal elegy, equal parts remembrance and renewal. Scored for violin, viola, cello, flute, oboe, clarinet, piano, percussion and guitar, it weaves sung vignettes with instrumental movements, each one echoing the voices of people and places that shaped the composer’s life.

Developed during Criswell-Badillo’s 2024 residency in Corsicana and inspired by his years in the oilfields of Texas and the Midwest, *A Rural Requiem* reflects his roots in the working-class cultures of the Southwest and his mixed Texas, Tejano and Indigenous Coahuiltecan heritage.



Where research and creativity work hand in hand

A student on her way out of Hamon Arts Library spies several dozen quirky little fabrications on a nearby table. A sign urges her to try her hand at crafting a miniature version of the welded steel and enamel sculptures featured in the Hawn Gallery’s fall exhibit, *Jer’Lisa Devezin: Texturized*.

She grabs a few bobby pins from an open container and gets to work. “I’m an artist,” she declares, adding her piece to the collection before heading to class.



That’s the sort of reaction exhibit curator Kate Alleman aims for. She devised the DIY sculpture station to “spark something in the viewer that might remain latent if they were simply viewing stationary artworks.” The hands-on activity allows visitors to “experience the physicality and challenge of building these sculptures at a larger scale,” she says.

Alleman joined the Hamon staff last year as the fine arts research librarian. As part of the Teaching and Learning team, she handles

library instruction for art history, studio art, dance and fashion media as well as Common Curriculum Writing and Reasoning courses.

She previously polished her arts-related reference and collection management skills at the Dallas Museum of Art’s Mayer Library. Her resume also includes a part-time position on the Fondren Library reference staff in 2012.

“I feel energized about returning after more than a decade! It’s been a treat to see some familiar faces and spaces, although quite a lot has changed,” she says.

In her SMU curatorial debut, Alleman collaborated closely with Devezin ’19, who holds a Master of Fine Arts from Meadows School of the Arts. The noted sculptor served on the school’s faculty for several years before accepting a tenure-track appointment at Tulane University in her hometown of New Orleans.

“I realized my curious nature couldn’t commit to one research focus.” Kate Alleman

“Jer’Lisa’s artistic practice is rooted in research. That made it such a great choice for showing in a gallery situated in a library,” Alleman says. “She experiments with the role, expression and presentation of the materials she uses to challenge the viewer’s experience of the nuances present within identity, socioeconomics, Black beauty and the meaning objects hold.”

As it does in Devezin’s art, research beats at the heart of Alleman’s librarianship. After receiving a B.A. in history from Texas Tech University with a minor in art history, she considered pursuing a master’s in museum studies. However, she decided a master’s degree in library science from the University of North Texas offered more flexibility.

“I realized my curious nature couldn’t commit to one research focus,” she says.

Alleman finds innovative ways to “encourage students to get creative with the research process.” To that end, she’s working this semester with an art professor on a game to spur students’ thinking “about how their information needs might change

according to the subject, discipline and output expectations of an assignment.”

Opportunities to work with artists, boost students’ resourcefulness and support faculty research make the fine arts research librarian position a natural fit for Alleman. “I’m very glad that life has led me back to SMU Libraries.” ■

Business library hosts innovative adjunct faculty retreat

The Duda Family Business Library kicked off the academic year by hosting its first-ever day of learning and networking for 35 Cox School of Business adjunct faculty members.

Led by Director Sandy Miller, the library team showcased how they actively support undergraduate and graduate education by partnering with faculty across programs, from students’ first semester through graduation. Their collaborative approach helps shape confident, career-ready graduates. During an interactive Q&A, librarians fielded questions and continued one-on-one conversations afterward, connecting faculty with valuable research resources.

The retreat opened with remarks from new Cox Dean Todd Milbourn, who praised the library team as “the experts who keep our faculty and students informed,” and thanked them “for getting us all ready to achieve great things in 2025–26 and beyond!”

Featured Cox speakers included Senior Associate Dean Bill Dillon and David Jacobson, clinical professor in Management, Strategy and Entrepreneurship and academic director of Online MBA and MBAD degrees, who both highlighted the vital role the library plays in the academic experience.

Melissa Johnson, instructional design and educational technologies librarian, presented an overview of her workshop that equips students with practical strategies for evaluating information using the SIFT (stop; investigate the source; find better coverage; trace claims, quotes and media to the original context) method. The training incorporates well-known AI tools, like ChatGPT, Perplexity and Copilot, and introduces Consensus, an AI academic search engine.

Tracey Rinehart, instruction coordinator and business graduate programs librarian, and Justin Harrison, business undergraduate programs librarian, discussed how the BBA and graduate research programs help students build and refine their research skills throughout their Cox experience.

Faculty feedback was overwhelmingly

positive. Shawn Storer, adjunct professor of Management, Strategy and Entrepreneurship, commended the library team for creating “an exceptional day of insights, learning and collaboration.”

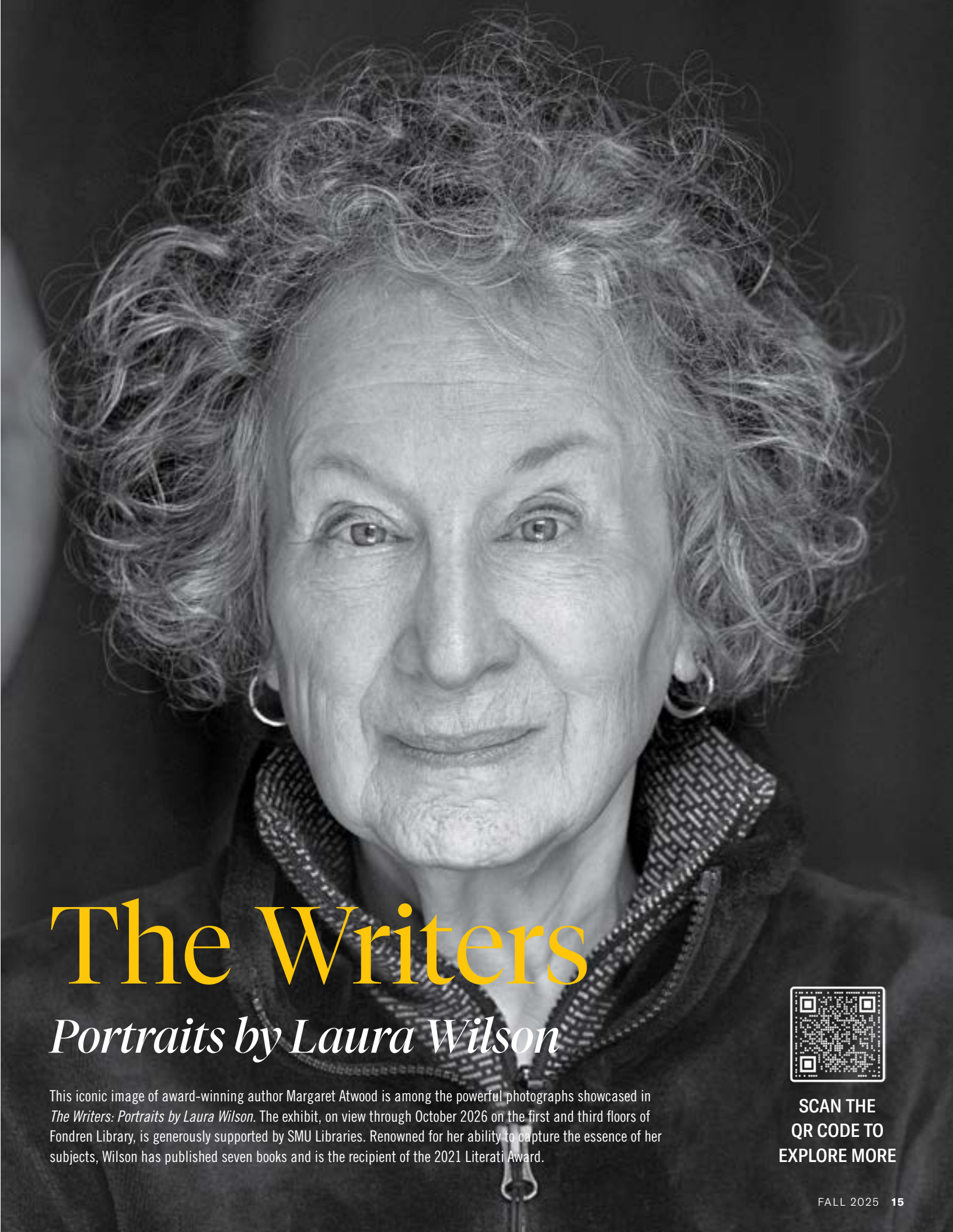


Encouraged by the success of this inaugural event, the Duda Family Business Library plans to make the adjunct faculty retreat an annual event to strengthen the partnership between faculty, librarians and the students they serve. ■



#PonyUp #SMULibraries #GameDayGold

SMU Libraries drummed up major Mustang spirit in Ford Stadium this season as sponsor of the Game Notes feature during home matchups. The complete takeover of the scoreboard, digital signs and banners, along with a voiceover announcement in the third quarter, was just part of the fun. Before Family Weekend, a social media “Golden Ticket” contest included a jackpot of four tickets to the game against Syracuse. MBA student Ali Novak ’26 struck gold on her second search of the Centennial Reading Room. She was thrilled to bring her parents, along with her brother and his girlfriend, to the game.



The Writers

Portraits by Laura Wilson

This iconic image of award-winning author Margaret Atwood is among the powerful photographs showcased in *The Writers: Portraits by Laura Wilson*. The exhibit, on view through October 2026 on the first and third floors of Fondren Library, is generously supported by SMU Libraries. Renowned for her ability to capture the essence of her subjects, Wilson has published seven books and is the recipient of the 2021 Literati Award.



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H

A–C SMU Libraries shows how to Pony Up! for Homecoming with miniature horses making a big splash at Pastries with Peruna. **D–E** With Friends, Families and First Years, SMU Libraries brought Mustang spirit to the Boulevard, welcoming everyone, including four-legged fans, to the celebration! **F** Faculty members joined Executive Vice President and Provost Rachel Davis Mersey, President Jay C. Hartzell, and Dean Holly E. Jeffcoat at SMU Libraries' annual Faculty Wine Reception to launch the new academic year. **G–H** Members of the Libraries Executive Board and Friends of SMU Libraries Board joined to celebrate another year of library support and advocacy. **I–J** SMU Libraries and campus partners presented Loteria in the Library, an evening of games, food and friendship.



J



Where every seat tells a story

Friends of SMU Libraries

Tables of Content

Featuring presentation of the 2026 Literati Award to Robert Wilonsky

Saturday, March 28, 2026 | 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Gene and Jerry Jones Grand Atrium | Owen Arts Center

Proceeds from this event benefit the Friends annual grants program and the addition and upgrade of student spaces in Fondren Library.



Join us!



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As library construction advances, excitement builds

Cranes tower over the site as work on the new Rees-Jones Library of the American West progresses.

As the “bones” go up and the new structure takes shape, so does a vision of this groundbreaking project’s future. When it opens in 2027, the facility will include such specialized spaces as a digitization and conservation lab, as well as a variety of study areas, a grand reading room, a map gallery and exhibition galleries. Until then, SMU Libraries staff continues to process materials in the renowned Rees-Jones Collection (see Page 9).