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## Libraries as Creators

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# Libraries as Creators



## *Stewart Baker*

OLAQ GUEST EDITOR

Stewart Baker is the Systems/Institutional Repository Librarian at Western Oregon University. He has an MLIS from the University of South Carolina and an MA in English from CSU Long Beach, and splits his work day between managing Hamersly Library's Digital Commons repository, its integrated library system, and helping patrons on the reference desk. In his spare non-work time, he writes science fiction and poetry.

This issue is titled “Beyond Curation: Libraries as Creators of Cultural, Digital, and Material Things.” What does that mean? In part, it is a common-sense observation that libraries are not mere inert receptacles of printed matter. It is also an assertion that libraries and librarians make things, and enable things to be made—either directly, through the provision of materials and tools, or indirectly, through the provision of space and expertise.

The articles in the issue come from librarians at all kinds of libraries, and deal with many different aspects of “creation.” But before I tell you about them, I’d like to tell you a story.

Once upon a not so long ago, I was an undergraduate student who had tentatively decided on aiming for library school. I was wandering the stacks when I stumbled upon an anthology of odd library science essays and articles. Although I’ve never been able to find it again, and don’t remember the title of the anthology, I have clear memories of reading an article that talked about the possibilities of nano-technology in libraries. The libraries in this hypothetical post-nano world, the author argued, could serve as public access factories, providing people with “recipes” to create real, working machines with their own supply of (hypothetically readily available) incredibly small, multi-purpose, self-replicating robots.

This was in the early 2000s, and the only place I’d encountered ideas like that before was in science fiction novels, so it was really exciting to think about futuristic library-factories taking an active role in enabling the creation of physical objects. These days, of course, it doesn’t sound quite so far-fetched. There are a rising number of libraries with 3D printers for patron use. While 3D printing may not be quite the same as nano-sized robots, it is still one way in which libraries have moved beyond their stereotypical roles as collectors of static information. I would even argue that this role has never been the sole purpose of publicly accessible libraries. There have always been less visible, less techy ways in which libraries have served as creators or co-creators, whether by creating exhibits, providing books that can serve as instruction manuals, giving communities and hobbyist groups and a space to work, plan, and collaborate, or any number of other approaches.

The articles in this issue of *OLA Quarterly*, as mentioned above, come from librarians working in public, academic, and school libraries, and the ways they and their libraries have been creating range from technological to cultural. Catherine Jasper shares her experience launching a local online music service at Deschutes Public Library. Peggy Christensen describes how students at Marshfield High School in Coos Bay use the library after school to create art and share knowledge. Karen Muller, Erica Buss, and Brendan Lax talk about how collections at Hillsboro Public Library have moved beyond books to help patrons bake cakes, teach themselves programming, and play games in the comfort of their own homes. And Dean Walton of the University of Oregon explains how a science librarian might find himself launching home-built rockets and satellites with local student groups.

It’s my hope that their shared expertise and experiences will inspire creation in libraries around Oregon, or that they’ll encourage librarians to think about and highlight how their libraries already create. If nothing else, the next time I tell someone I work in a library and they say “It must be very quiet working with books all the time,” I’ll have a better response than “Something like that.”

