

Journey to *Crossroads*: A Commitment to Collaboration, DEI, & the Public Good

Christopher L. Proctor, Associate Librarian

Coordinator of Access Services
Campus Accreditation Project Manager
Indiana University Southeast
New Albany, IN 47150
clprocto@iu.edu

When I was asked by Mark Dehmlow, managing editor of *Crossroads: The Journal of Indiana Libraries*, to chronicle the journal's journey from conception to launch, I accepted with no small amount of gratitude and enthusiasm. But those feelings were also mixed with trepidation because the journey had been long, non-linear, and, at times, arduous. Despite that fact, the journey has also been rewarding, inspiring a level of inter-association collaboration and support within the Indiana Library Federation (ILF) that I hope will continue to manifest in the content published and value derived by all manifestations of librarianship within the state of Indiana. After all, this is why I chose the symbolism of the name *Crossroads*: Just as Indiana is known as 'the Crossroads of America,' so too will this journal be the intellectual crossroads of all Indiana libraries, librarians, library professionals, and patrons. Therefore, I am honored to serve as its chronicler.

I joined the ILF Board of Directors in January 2019, serving out the term of one of the two academic positions representing the Indiana Academic Library Association (IALA), the academic arm of ILF. I would later be elected to the same position for a two-year term that same year. One of my responsibilities on the Board was to advocate for Indiana academic libraries, while also balancing the needs of our public- and school-library colleagues. Having been in public libraries for several years prior to my transition to academia, I felt I could be a fair and mindful voice, while also striving for collaboration. At that time in ILF, the individual and institutional membership numbers for academic librarians and libraries, respectively, were very low, and one question I had been asked repeatedly was: *How do we increase academic membership and participation?* After a careful review of services, programs, and advocacy efforts, I responded, each time, with: *Increase the value of what ILF offers for academics and provide opportunities that actually align with their professional interests and job requirements.* When asked for specifics from the Board, my colleagues and I in IALA agreed that a high-quality, peer-reviewed publishing venue would be a great first step.

For context, ILF had previously published a scholarly journal; many readers may remember or even have contributed to *Indiana Libraries* (1981 – 2016). By the time I joined the Board of Directors in 2019, however, ILF had already ceased producing content for various reasons. Two concerns, in particular, were related to 1) quality and scope of submissions during its final years, and 2) lack of a robust and diverse infrastructure needed for peer-reviewed publishing. With the blessing of IALA, I made it my personal charge to resurrect a high-quality, peer-reviewed publishing outlet that would serve *all* Indiana libraries through scholarly and professional collaboration. Then, on December 17, 2020, after weeks of researching other journals and scholarly publishing best practices, I wrote the first formal proposal for what would become, not a relaunch, but the creation of an entirely new journal.

From its earliest stages and through the many subsequent drafts of proposals, I was committed to three foundational pillars:

1. Commitment to Collaboration & Collegiality

As we all know, librarianship and the organizations that serve and advocate for it face many challenges and obstacles imposed from the outside. When we approach these challenges and obstacles independently, from within our traditional silos, we are weaker. However, when we combine our unique areas of strength, we become a powerful force capable of affecting real change. From the beginning, I wanted *Crossroads* to be a space where the many different areas of expertise within academic, public, school, and special libraries could come together to help ILF achieve its “mission to lead, educate, and advocate to advance library services for the benefit of Indiana residents.” In this way, I believed that all four of ILF’s associations, along with the libraries they serve, would benefit from high-quality scholarship: Association of Indiana School Library Educators (AISLE); Indiana Academic Library Association (IALA); Indiana Public Library Association (IPLA); and Indiana Library Stakeholders Association (ILSA), formerly known as Indiana Library Trustee & Supporter Association (ILSTA).

Similarly, ILF is not the only library-focused organization in Indiana. Each has its own mission and areas of specialization, and yet, there is some level of overlap, especially for those serving libraries within institutions of higher learning. And if one of the main challenges for maintaining the journal’s infrastructure was ILF’s low membership numbers and lacking participation from the academic library community, then a potential solution would be to rally participation from the wider community of academic library support groups. With this in mind, and with approval from IALA, I reached out to three additional organizations to build a partnership and to invite their collaboration. After what was, in some cases, years of conversations, I am proud that *Crossroads* is an

inter-association partnership between the Indiana Academic Library Association (IALA), Indiana Black Librarians Network (IBLN), Academic Libraries of Indiana (ALI), and Private Academic Library Network of Indiana (PALNI).

2. Commitment to Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

From the beginning, I wanted *Crossroads* to be committed to challenging historically problematic practices within both scholarly publishing and librarianship. As we know as professionals in our field, both librarianship and scholarly publishing have been complicit in the marginalization of groups, and it is our responsibility to recognize, challenge, and dismantle these systems of bias and oppression. To help accomplish this, my vision for this journal was that it would:

- Actively seek out and encourage submissions from diverse populations of authors, especially those historically marginalized by librarianship and traditional scholarly publishing practices;
- Actively seek out content and submissions addressing the concerns of diverse and marginalized groups and communities served by Indiana libraries;
- Actively foster diverse voices and promote authentic inclusion within its editorial board, community of peer reviewers, and authors;
- Actively assess and reevaluate publishing policies and practices to deconstruct privilege and bias.

3. Commitment to Open Access & the Public Good

I have always held the opinion that scholarship should be produced for the public good. Erecting paywalls around scholarly information resources limits access and, by doing so, minimizes its potential impact on the profession and on the lives of our patrons using our collections, services, and spaces. Due to this, I was adamant from the very beginning that ILF could only have my proposal if it committed to an open-access publishing policy. It did, so here we are.

With these three commitments outlined, I submitted an updated draft of the proposal to the IALA Board via email on February 8, 2021, and made the motion to formally accept and commit to it, and to forward it on to the ILF Board of Directors for ratification. On February 9, the votes were counted; the motion passed unanimously. Around this time, there was a confluence of events that would slow but not deter the steady progress of the journal. Leadership throughout ILF, including IALA, was changing. In March 2021, I was appointed Interim Chair of IALA and, after discussing the future of the association within the umbrella of ILF, while also arranging for elections, I became the permanent Chair from May 2021 to December 2022. At the same time, ILF – as an organization – was experiencing significant and earthshaking challenges at all levels

of leadership. As a result, movement on the journal quickly slowed as the ILF Board of Directors focused its energy on addressing crucial, time-sensitive matters. And yet, by the end of 2021, the Board voted and unanimously approved the creation of *Crossroads*.

Even after this milestone, momentum for the journal was slow but steady for a variety of reasons. Chief among them was my new role in ILF. In May 2022, I assumed the vacant position of Vice President/President-Elect and committed to serving as President for 2023 and Past-President for 2024. While keeping an eye out for the journal at the ILF Board level, my focus was pulled from IALA to ILF as a whole, and much of IALA's subsequent work on the journal during this time fell to the new and remarkable leadership of Laura Bernhardt, Ph.D., Research & Instruction Librarian at University of Southern Indiana's David L. Rice Library. And after an additional two years of hard work in brainstorming, researching, designing, and strategizing, it was time to hire a managing editor. On June 17, 2024, Laura and I asked the ILF Board to financially invest in the journal by allocating an annual stipend to the managing editor. They agreed. On November 19, 2024, IALA selected Mark Dehmlow, Associate Dean for Digital Strategies & Technology at the University of Notre Dame, to fill this role and lead us forward. I am confident *Crossroads* will become a thriving scholarly publication venue under his excellent leadership.

The launch of the journal was officially announced on November 10, 2025, at the ILF Annual Conference. As I sit here reflecting on and writing the story of its journey, nearly five years to the day I drafted the first proposal for *Crossroads*, I cannot help but feel pride and hope. I am also filled with immense gratitude to the many people whose support and hard work made the launch of this journal possible. In particular, I want to spotlight three extraordinary individuals who championed the creation of *Crossroads* from the very beginning: Diane Rogers, ILF 2024 President; Mike Williams, ILF 2022 President; and Laura Bernhardt, 2024-2025 IALA Chair. Collectively, these three represent the major types of librarianship in the state of Indiana – serving school, public, and academic libraries, respectively – and embody authentic collaboration. While two small words cannot begin to express the depths of my gratitude: *Thank you*.

Now, I would like to close by issuing a series of challenges:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| To the Editorial Board: | I challenge you to uphold the three commitment pillars upon which the foundation of the journal was built. |
| To the IALA Board: | I challenge you to maintain, strengthen, and expand inter-association partnerships to foster authentic, inclusive collaboration. |

- To the ILF Board:** I challenge you to financially support the journal and to uphold the highest standards of intellectual and academic freedom.
- To Academic Colleagues:** I challenge you to lend your support and expertise to strengthening and maintaining the infrastructure needed for scholarly publishing.
- And to You, Dear Reader:** I challenge you to support Indiana libraries, library professionals, and patrons by reading and contributing to *Crossroads: The Journal of Indiana Libraries*.