A Message From The Dean of University Libraries, Matthew Shaw

“The Obsolete Man” is a terrifying episode of the Twilight Zone, a television series famous for its dystopian didactics. In the episode, which aired in 1961, a librarian named Romney Wordsworth is brought before the tribunal of a totalitarian state and pronounced “obsolete.” In the fictional society where all information is controlled by the state and books are illegal, the role of the librarian is deemed both unnecessary and dangerous to the monolithic authoritarianism of the government. Mr. Wordsworth, condemned to death for his occupational crime, is a composite archetype of intellectual freedom, collective human knowledge, and informed citizenry. The librarian stands for the right to know, the right to access, and the right to think.

Librarians, and those involved in library work, are essential to these fundamental freedoms, and their professional efforts to collect, organize, describe, preserve, and disseminate information are of increasing merit in a world where reliability and accuracy grow amongst the tares of misinformation and disinformation. Librarians actively fight censorship and promote the information literacies that empower discoverers to discover, process, and synthesize the complexity of ideas communicated by a fully-inclusive spectrum of voices.

These values are integral to our work at the University Libraries, and I am very humbled to lead the passionate team of library staff at Ball State focused on teaching students to explore and engage with the world of ideas. Through effective library instruction, 1:1 library services, and rich scholarly collections, we are able to teach learners how to find, evaluate, contextualize, and utilize information—skills essential to navigating the murky information landscape where creators cleverly package spurious content as irresistible fact.

Your dedicated support continues to fuel the vital work of the University Libraries to collect and make discoverable the breadth of credible scholarship while teaching students how to test validity, understand the construction of authority and meaning, and navigate misinformation, viewpoints and challenging ideas. Every day, Ball State librarians are equipping students to become critical thinkers, active citizens, and lifelong learners. Far from obsolete, today’s librarian is an essential educator and learning partner.

Thank you, Friends of the Alexander M. Bracken Library, for making the Libraries a center for intellectual life at Ball State University!

A Thank You to Michael Szajewski

In September, Assistant Dean for Digital Scholarship and Special Collections and Executive Secretary of the Friends of the Alexander M. Bracken Library Michael Szajewski departed Ball State University to accept a position as Associate Dean for Special Research Collections at the University of Oklahoma.

Michael faithfully served the Ball State University Libraries for the past eleven years, working the last five years in the Assistant Dean role. He was actively engaged in the work of the Friends, planning our annual gatherings and recruiting the Board of Governors. While at the Libraries, Michael collaboratively introduced new and impactful services in digital scholarship and publishing, web archiving, and open educational resources. He also led the Archives and Special Collections in an important period of growth, building up collections and including important content from marginalized and underrepresented communities. His work in community engagement and community programming has also established strong relationships with partners in our city and region.

We wish Mike well in his future endeavors and reflect with gratitude on his many contributions to the work of the Friends and the progress of the Libraries in serving our students, faculty, and community.
Financial donations by the Library Friends to existing Ball State University Foundation accounts supporting the University Libraries are always greatly appreciated, and we would like to thank all of our Friends. The following donors made contributions of $100 or more in fiscal year 2021-2022.

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At Your Service, Suzanne Rice, Assistant Dean for Public Services

New Options for Personal and Group Study

The University Libraries offer a variety of study and workspaces to suit every need from group study rooms to quiet nooks for focused individual study. Options in Bracken Library increased recently with the addition of very cool private study spaces and new collaborative seating on 1West behind the Writing Center @ Bracken.

If students are looking for a personal study space away from visual distractions, there are three new individual study pods, each with a comfortable lounge seating, a wraparound panel to minimize visual distractions, a safe place to tuck backpacks, and wireless access. It’s like a personal study cocoon!

If students want to study with a few friends or just need a surface to spread out projects, they can use one of the three new study tables located on 2West, or try easy-to-slide, self-contained pods at the Design and Engineering Library on 1North. They have a comfy vibe reminiscent of a vintage soda shop booth, but with modern conveniences like out pulls on cushions that provide excellent lumbar support for long-haul study sessions.

Did you know that the Timbers Lumber Company was founded in 1865 in Muncie? Also, did you know that Muncie’s most famous landmark is "The Harlequin"? Our heritage is based on 200 years of history. In 1865, the Kirby-Wood Lumber Company acquired the assets of the Timbers Lumber Company and the firm became known as the Kirby-Wood Lumber Company. The company continued to operate until 1949, when it was sold to two brothers, Ralph and Bob Kennedy, who moved to the new home on the corner of Tillotson and Kilgore. Originally founded in 1820 as the Kirby Lumber company, this prominent local family business served the community for over 150 years.

New Digital Collection: Edith Kimberly Kirb Collection

The Kirby family consisted of numerous men and women who helped develop Muncie into an industrial city from the late 1800s to the early 1900s, and their influence on the city continues to this day.

One notable member of the Kirby family is Edith Elizabeth Kimberly Kirb. Edith was born on January 21, 1875 in Muncie to Thomas Hickman Kirb and Anna Cassidy Kirb. Her father was a Union Army veteran of the American Civil War and spent much of his youth traveling across the country, even spending some time in France during World War I. Her paternal grandfather, Thomas Kirb, was one of Delaware County’s earliest European-American pioneers, arriving in Muncie in 1839 peddling goods from a company in Dayton, Ohio. He started his own general store in 1831. At the time, this was the second store in town and before the natural gas boom of the 1880s. Thomas built the oldest residential home still standing in Delaware County, which is located at 1353 East Jackson. In 1871 Thomas left his general store business and founded the Kirby House, the first hardware store and business center. Located on Main Street across from the current Muncie Civic Theater, the Kirby House was where the founders of the time conducted their business. The Kirby Brothers were boarders of the hotel until they married. Susan B. Anthony was a guest at the hotel in 1854.

To commemorate the legacy of Edith Elizabeth Kimberly Kirb and her family, the Ball State University Archives and Special Collections has published the Edith Kimberly Kirb collection to our Digital Media Repository. The Kirby House was where the founders of the time conducted their business. The Kirby Brothers were boarders of the hotel until they married. Susan B. Anthony was a guest at the hotel in 1854.

Like most women of her class in this time period, Edith was involved in local women’s clubs and societies. She makes frequent appearances in the society pages of local Muncie papers, generally attending card games, teas, and luncheons. Her favorite social event was the annual dance, which was "The Harlequin", which was held at her home in 1892. According to one article, it was a club for "old maids", and none of the members could marry after they hit the age of "an old maid" (this specific age was never stated). Interestingly, her father, Thomas Hickman Kirb, also formed an old bachelor’s club with seven other Muncie men in 1856, in a club in which they vowed to never marry. One could imagine that Edith may have been inspired by her father’s club to form the old maid’s club.

Edith eventually married—at the age of 25, no less—to Robert Bernard Barnes, who died in infancy. A year after his death, she returned to Muncie, where they welcomed their second child, a son named Robert Denner Barns.

Upon her return to Muncie, Edith became active in many local clubs and events. She was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Paul Revere Chapter where she filled elected positions such as historian, reg- istrar, and chaplain. She also participated in raising funds for the Kirby Museum. Edith took part in a lo- cal sorority of which she was a member—to fund low-income schools in the Kentucky Ap- palachian Mountains.

Near the end of her life, Edith spent time working for the war effort, volunteering at Mus- cine’s rationing board taking part in various functions including handing out ration books and distributing supplies and food. She also spent time with her son, Robert D. Barnes, Jr., his wife, Louise Howard Barnes, and her three grandchildren. She passed away on August 24, 1943, before she could see the war’s end.

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