

Application for the ACRL Excellence in Academic Libraries Award
<https://acrl.libwizard.com/f/acrlawards>

Institution Mission:

Clemson University was established to fulfill our founder's vision of "a high seminary of learning" to develop "the material resources of the State" for the people of South Carolina. Nurtured by an abiding land grant commitment, Clemson has emerged as a research university with a global vision. Our primary purpose is educating undergraduate and graduate students to think deeply about and engage in the social, scientific, economic, and professional challenges of our times. The foundation of this mission is the generation, preservation, communication, and application of knowledge. The University also is committed to the personal growth of the individual and promotes an environment of good decision making, healthy and ethical lifestyles, and tolerance and respect for others. Our distinctive character is shaped by a legacy of service, collaboration, and fellowship forged from and renewed by the spirit of Thomas Green Clemson's covenant.

3. University Library

Submission Criteria Questions

Advancement of Institutional Mission (500 words)

Clemson University Libraries advances the institution's vision as "a high seminary of learning" and supports its evolution into a global research university through deliberate alignment with the three pillars of the university's strategic plan, *Clemson Elevate*. Following Clemson's achievement of Carnegie R1 status in 2016, we reimagined their role in supporting institutional excellence. A benchmarking exercise found we needed to grow in staffing, budget and space, and specifically invest in enhancing digital literacy, increasing research services for faculty, improving learning affordability for students, and building high-quality archival collections. To accomplish these goals, a major restructuring in 2022 created three library divisions aligned with Clemson Elevate's core commitments: delivering the premier student experience, doubling research by 2035, and transforming lives statewide.

Our commitment to the premier student experience is epitomized by our Learning Commons. It serves as a central learning hub where students find peer research assistance, consult with campus experts, and learn skills which abet academic success, professional development, and wellbeing. Developed in collaboration with campus partners like the Writing Lab, Career Center, and Healthy Campus, the space has become a hit among students, who voted the floor the "best study space on campus" two years in a row. Students express a sense of belonging and support, exemplified by one student's reflection: "I feel so loved." The Learning Commons hosts more than a thousand students annually.

In support of Clemson's goal to double research by 2035, we developed the Data Visualization Lab, an interdisciplinary hub that equips students and faculty with skills in Power BI, Tableau, R, and Python through workshops, consultations, and curricular partnerships. In Fall 2025 alone, the Lab offered 25 workshops to more than 400 participants. The Lab also assists faculty in the

creation of data management plans and provides advice on data storage. These initiatives encourage the “preservation, communication, and application of knowledge.”

The Libraries transform lives through the work of the Watt Family Innovation Center (WFIC). WFIC serves as a catalyst for faculty to work with industry partners, encouraging original research. One example of this is the Media Forensics Hub. Run by faculty in Communications and Economics, the Hub seeks to understand and limit the impact of false information on social media. WFIC connected the Hub with the Knight Foundation, which provided \$3.8M in funds to support the work. Today, the Hub consists of 11 affiliated faculty and five full-time staff. It has registered intellectual property and is working with the US Department of Defense. The Hub’s research has become a “material resource for the people of South Carolina.”

Thanks to these initiatives and in recognition of our support of the University mission, Clemson University Libraries have grown substantially. Our budget grew by \$10 million in 6 years. Our collections budget grew by \$2 million, and we gained 50 employees. We also added three branches and three historic properties. With these gains, Clemson University Libraries proudly achieved membership in the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), a milestone recognizing our longstanding investment in world-class research infrastructure.

Impact on Institutional Stakeholders (498 words)

Clemson University Libraries provides high quality services to stakeholders and is dedicated to listening to and meeting their needs. We do this through the administration of the Creative Inquiry (CI) undergraduate research program, championing open access, and ensuring our spaces remain welcoming and productive for students.

The Creative Inquiry program significantly impacts the Clemson curriculum by hosting thousands of students annually in research projects that generate data for major grants and high-impact publications. Students consistently describe the program as one of the most valuable components of their Clemson education. Faculty credit CI with producing data and ideas that advance critical research. CI remains Clemson’s hallmark experiential learning program, impacting more than 72,000 students since 2005 and supporting hundreds of faculty mentors across all majors. Students frequently describe CI as more practical and transformative than traditional coursework, citing its direct role in securing internships and full-time positions. Faculty recognize its value in building research capacity through the generation of preliminary data, grant-ready ideas, and award-winning publications.

In an evolving scholarly communication landscape, Clemson University Libraries play an essential role in advancing open access (OA) publishing practices, enabling researchers to share and disseminate their research without financial or geographic barriers. The Libraries support open access publishing in two ways: an Open Access Publishing Fund (OAPF) and transformative agreements. The OAPF provides funds for Clemson authors to cover article processing charges (APCs). The OAPF has grown from \$10,000 to \$50,000 and currently serves about 40 faculty per year. The Libraries also negotiate transformative agreements (TAs) with

publishers such as Elsevier, Wiley, Springer, and more. These agreements transition traditional paywall models towards open access publishing, allowing Clemson faculty to publish their work without bearing the full APC costs. To date, we have negotiated eleven agreements since 2022, saving the university \$2,327,995. These partnerships not only reduce the financial strain on Clemson researchers but also contribute to reshaping the global scholarly publishing ecosystem.

Cooper Library receives over 1.5M visitors a year, primarily students, who have embraced space as their own, reflecting our innovative, student-centered approach to space design. Our second-floor houses both the ultimate quiet study space, a Hogwarts-style reading room with historic furniture which students describe as “cozy, inviting, and consistently full,” and a Reflection Room, suggested and designed by students to support wellness. The latter, which includes cushions, yoga mats, plants, a water feature, sound machine, and a small library collection on mindfulness, yoga, and reflection, has been widely utilized, with 74% of users reporting reduced stress and improved academic performance. Responding to requests from students to add more seating, we moved all the bound journals from Cooper’s sixth floor, creating a collaborative study environment with some of the best views on campus. The fifth floor’s mixed-use design includes the Adobe Studio and Makerspace, enabling students to engage in creative, technology-enhanced learning. Each floor of Cooper has been carefully crafted with student input, reflecting our dedication to the creation of research-informed spaces that support academic success and wellbeing for all students.

Initiative (495 words)

Clemson University Libraries demonstrates initiative through its leadership in affordable learning and digital and artificial intelligence (AI) literacy.

The cost of higher education continues to increase, and students are left with tough financial choices. The Libraries identified this as an issue for Clemson students and took the initiative to develop an Open Education Resources program to save students money. Our OER stipend program, started in 2018 to encourage faculty to adopt or create online course materials, has reduced or eliminated textbook costs for more than 40 courses, saving students over \$2 million and reducing annual costs by at least \$400,000 for more than 4,000 students. Our 2019 partnership with Clemson Undergraduate Student Government further expanded affordability through a textbook lending program that has supported over 1,000 students with more than 3,060 checkouts to date.

Understanding the changing expectations of digital literacy in the classroom, Clemson University Libraries provides equipment and support to students in creating images, videos, podcasts, and prototypes. This led to the birth of the Adobe Studio and Makerspace (ASM), a partnership funded by Adobe in 2016 to educate students in the use of the Adobe Creative Suite. The ASM was the first of its kind when created, giving rise to over 100 locations in universities across the US. The ASM houses video and audio studios, and recently added the Clemson Makerspace, managed by the Makerspace Student Organization student club. The Makerspace has 33 free 3D printers as well as a t-shirt printer, sticker printer, embroidery machine, Cricut press, and other

equipment. Anyone is welcome to seek one-on-one assistance, participate in workshops, collaborate with other makers, or work on course or personal projects. The ASM provides education to over 80 class sessions annually, reaching around 2,000 students from over 70 majors, and facilitates 30 workshops with an average of 500 participants. It receives over 33,000 visits annually, with students remarking that they “could not have completed assignments or received good grades” without the ASM’s help.

Noting a gap in artificial intelligence education with the rise of large language models, Clemson University Libraries has taken the initiative to lead campus efforts to promote responsible AI literacy. Guided by the EDUCAUSE AI Literacy Framework, we now offer a series of workshops and a 10-Step AI Challenge that builds confidence with emerging technologies. To support curricular integration, we developed an embeddable Canvas course that faculty can seamlessly incorporate into their classes. The Libraries purchased a subscription to Scite, providing a tool to deliver high quality research results in response to AI prompts. Libraries’ faculty, along with members of the Office of Teaching Effectiveness and Innovation (OTEI), were chosen to participate in the AAC&U AI, Pedagogy, and the Curriculum Institute. The institute inspired the creation of TEACH-AI: Teaching, Exploration, And Community Hub for AI. The Hub is a community of practice dedicated to supporting instructors in exploring the role of generative AI in teaching and learning. 59 faculty from disciplines throughout campus have signed up to participate.

Innovation – Creative Problem-Solving and Resourcefulness (487 words)

Innovation remains central to our mission and is reflected in our approaches to preserving unique collections, supporting students, and serving the community.

In 2022 Clemson University Libraries had the unique opportunity to take on administration of Clemson’s Historic Properties and oversee the work of the new University Historian. Clemson’s Historic Properties encompass three properties: Fort Hill, the plantation home of Thomas Green Clemson; Hanover House, a French Huguenot home from the South Carolina low country now located in the SC Botanical Garden; and Hopewell Plantation, the home of Revolutionary War General Andrew Pickens. At the time, these properties were understaffed and under resourced and adding them to the Libraries’ portfolio felt appropriate. Like museums, Libraries acquire, describe and preserve materials, and the Libraries administrative structure would allow Historic Properties to focus on developing programs for community members and integrating the properties into the university curriculum. Since joining the Libraries, traffic and engagement with the campus have increased and programs have been developed with the departments of History and Anthropology to create hands-on learning opportunities for students. Additionally, a program was launched to help local educators integrate regional history into public school curricula. The University Historian, hired in 2022, has thrived as well. He has developed a credit course on Clemson history, travelled across the state to lecture on Clemson history, and has engaged in positive dialogue regarding some of the challenges embedded within it.

We are always looking for innovative ways to support undergraduates and the university's strategic goals. Recently, a new Experiential Learning Hub (ELH) has been integrated into our Learning Commons. The ELH shares experiential learning opportunities with students and assists faculty with developing experiential opportunities for their courses. Examples of the products of experiential learning will also be displayed.

After identifying additional financial gaps for students, the Libraries developed two distinctive programs: purchasing homework codes for Pell Eligible students and providing lab supplies to students in need. Since many textbooks are considered the property of one person, the Libraries could not provide complimentary homework codes to students utilizing our textbook collection. Our OER Librarian worked with the Registrar's Office to identify students who would benefit from receiving these codes. The lab supplies project is a collaboration with the department of Biology to provide lab coats and goggles to students who cannot afford them. We distributed 129 lab supplies to 54 students in fall 2025.

To support the community, in response to complaints that community members and alumni could not visit campus due to lack of parking, we created two off-campus branches – one at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) in Patrick Square, a Clemson retirement community, and another at the Clemson Emeritus College offices. These branches allow community members to request items from our collections and then receive and return them to these locations. In 2025 we loaned 61 items to OLLI members, and provided educational programs in critical analysis of information and AI.

Collaboration (490 words)

Achieving excellence through collaboration remains a guiding principle for Clemson University Libraries. The Learning Commons stands as our most visible example of collaborative leadership, bringing together eighteen campus partners to create an integrated ecosystem of support. This model produced a critical solution when the Center for Career and Professional Development faced potential isolation through off-campus relocation; its integration into the Learning Commons now enables the delivery of more than 1,300 counseling sessions annually with exceptionally high satisfaction rates.

Our campus collaborations extend further through Creative Inquiry, which engages colleges across the university and includes ten of Clemson's eleven recent NSF CAREER award recipients as mentors. This interdisciplinary structure strengthens research excellence while bridging institutional silos. Our Open Parks Network partnership with the National Park Service represents another form of collaborative innovation. This partnership, funded by an IMLS grant of \$773,444 in 2009, made a repository of parks materials freely available to the public. The collection has grown to include over 1 million images, broadening the Libraries' impact on cultural heritage preservation.

Externally, we actively collaborate with regional libraries. The Oconee, Pickens, and Anderson Libraries (OPAL) partnership, launched in 2019, unites public and academic libraries across the

tri-county region to deliver public programming, professional development, and community engagement. Participation in statewide and regional networks - including the South Carolina Digital Library, PASCAL (the Partnership of Academic South Carolina Academic Libraries), and ASERL (the Association of Southeast Research Libraries) - further extends our reach. A unique partnership with PASCAL and the Libraries' Clemson University Press provides publication support to faculty at universities throughout the state who want to create open textbooks. This mirrors a statewide collaboration to create open robotics textbooks funded by a \$2 million grant from the US Department of Education. Entitled Co-DREAM OER, the collaboration is spearheaded by a team of faculty from Clemson's College of Engineering, Computing and Applied Sciences, the Clemson University Center for Workforce Development, as well as the Trident Technical College Division of Engineering and Construction and Tuskegee University Mechanical Engineering Department. They expect to produce nine textbooks at the community college, four-year, and graduate levels.

Partnerships with cultural institutions such as the Clemson African American Museum, the Bertha Lee Strickland Museum, and the African American Heritage Trail advance our shared commitment to preserving regional history. Two recent grants totaling \$20,000 fund a collaboration between the Libraries, English Department, History and Geography Department, and local county governments called Deeds Unbound. The goal of the project is to digitize South Carolina property deeds to enrich historical and genealogical research resources on enslaved people throughout the state.

Lastly, Clemson University Libraries recently negotiated an agreement with Oconee County, SC, to display the original will of Thomas Green Clemson on the Clemson campus. The will, which serves as the founding document of the university, had been stored for years. Thanks to this important collaboration, the document can now be viewed by Clemson community members and alumni in perpetuity.