

Re-Engaging University of Houston Libraries Supporters

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University of Houston (UH) Libraries hosted its first stewardship event in November 2024 after many recurring donor-centric events had been indefinitely paused for various reasons. As such, UH Libraries' administration was enthusiastic about re-engaging historical, ongoing, and gift-in-kind supporters. As the University approaches its centennial in 2027, and the libraries embark on a bold journey of transformation, engaging potential donors is recognized as a critical component of these initiatives.

Books and Bubbly brought friends and supporters into the MD Anderson Library Elizabeth D. Rockwell Pavilion as a way to share the latest projects, resources, and librarian scholarship offered for the advancement of student success, faculty research, and community engagement.



(Interim dean Christina Gola gives welcome remarks at Books and Bubbly.)

The event featured librarians, archivists, and students discussing current initiatives at anchor tables arranged throughout the venue in a configuration that provided for easy flow and facilitated dialogue between guests and presenters. Hors d'oeuvres and champagne were offered. Interim dean Christina H. Gola opened the celebration with thanks and introduced *Reimagined Libraries*, a vision that is driving the development of transformative spaces and services at UH Libraries. Guests were invited to imagine the possibilities as they engaged with the presenters, and to consider their roles in bringing the *Reimagined Libraries* plan to bear. The event format was informal, allowing guests to walk freely from one station to the next, in no particular order. QR codes linking to the libraries' giving page were placed on tables around the space.

Librarians, archivists, and students spoke with attendees on a variety of compelling projects:

- a demonstration of preservation and reformatting efforts with audio/visual archives from the KUHT Film and Video collection
- a guided tour of the exhibit titled *Nevertheless, She Persisted!*, with materials from the Carey Shuart Women's Research Collection
- the expansion of access to open educational resources
- the newly formed peer mentor program in which undergrads are taught research and teaching skills, and find creative means of teaching their peers across campus through co-curricular engagement
- the evaluation of circulating print collections to inform how UH Libraries can transform spaces and make collections more visible
- how UH Libraries makes their collections more accessible through cataloging research efforts
- the display of materials from the University Archives and how this collection helps tell the story of the University's legacy and impact
- discussion of student-centered digital humanities projects

Event attendees gave positive feedback and expressed interest in upcoming programs. The configuration of the space and the casual nature of the occasion contributed to well-received presentations and dialogue. The display of preservation tools and archival materials drew interest and led to informative and lively exchanges.

A post-event evaluation by the planning team indicated several areas of opportunity:

- a need for a printed program with details on the presentations
- a need for visuals representing digital humanities projects
- starting the planning process earlier and coordinating well ahead of the event date with the University's Division of Advancement
- better coordination on encouraging guests to visit with all presenters
- providing more information for attendees on how they can continue to engage with the libraries through events and other programming

Books and Bubbly served as the soft launch of a refreshed series of fundraising and engagement events that is set to continue in the fall of 2025. It was intended to re-engage supporters and publicly announce the *Reimagined Libraries* campaign. As UH Libraries begins planning its event roster for the 2025-26 academic year, we will take valuable knowledge gained from the *Books and Bubbly* experience and apply it toward a revamped, re-energized program of stewardship and engagement.