

# Student Library Advisory Committee 2025-26

Allison Morrow, Director of Communications, SLAC Chair  
2025-2026 Academic Year Summary and Recommendations

## Executive Summary

The Student Library Advisory Committee (SLAC) served as a vital bridge between the student body and CUL Leadership during the 2025-26 academic year. Comprising representatives from across Columbia's schools, the committee addressed critical areas such as spatial utility, technology infrastructure, shifting digital access models (notably the Elsevier transition), and research support awareness. The year's work culminated in a series of actionable insights regarding spatial norms, technology gaps, and the necessity for integrated student training and awareness on emerging research tools, including AI.

## Committee Overview

**Mission and Purpose:** SLAC is a collaborative forum designed to ensure that student voices directly inform the policies, services, and physical environments of Columbia University Libraries. The committee meets 4-5 times per year but considers student feedback on an ongoing basis. The committee's primary purpose is to identify student "pain points," evaluate new library initiatives, and provide qualitative feedback to CUL Leadership. By fostering a direct line of communication between diverse student populations and administration, SLAC aims to enhance the awareness, accessibility, comfort, and academic utility of library resources.

## Key Themes, Discussions, Accomplishments

**Spatial Norms and Facilities:** A recurring theme was the ambiguity of spatial norms across various locations. Students often select study spaces based on functional "vibes," such as talkative versus silent zones that are not captured by occupancy data alone. Ongoing pain points include aging furniture in Lehman, cleanliness concerns in Butler, and a demand for modern amenities like charging stations and wellness-oriented furniture (e.g., walking pads).

- **2025-26 Accomplishment:** Following committee feedback on site-specific facilities reporting, we partnered with Facilities to install QR code stickers on all Butler Library water stations. This data-driven surge in reporting successfully led to the prioritized replacement of nearly every station in the building.
- **2025-26 Accomplishment:** Following committee feedback on the difficulty of choosing study space in Butler due to a wide variety of noise levels and food tolerance, we implemented new signage outside each reading room that includes key information such as typical noise level, food/drink policy information, where to get help finding materials, and information about videoconferencing options nearby.

**Technology and Software Infrastructure:** The committee identified a significant gap between student expectations and the Libraries' current offerings. A primary concern is the need for

entry-level training that demystifies existing library tools and reduces the "barrier to entry" for students intimidated by advanced research technology. Additionally, public hardware, specifically scanners, is frequently viewed as outdated or unusable. Beyond hardware, there is high demand for a standardized software package, including professional PDF editing tools like PowerPDF.

- **2025-26 Accomplishment:** While not directly SLAC-led, the Libraries are collaborating with CUIT to develop a standard software package for library computers. Once finalized, a communications strategy informed by existing and new SLAC feedback will be launched to clarify which tools are universally available and which specialized software is restricted to specific locations.

**Digital Access and Research Support:** The transition away from the Elsevier subscription represented a major shift in article access, particularly for certain graduate students. While the new model ensures access, students initially found the workflow cumbersome. Additionally, while specialized offerings like data services and publishing support are available, visibility remains a hurdle; the committee suggests that discipline-specific outreach (e.g., orientations for Political Science students) is more effective than general orientations.

- **2025-26 Accomplishment:** SLAC was instrumental in auditing and refining the newly developed "Get Articles" help pages during the Elsevier transition. By incorporating committee feedback on the Article Galaxy Scholar workflow, we streamlined outward-facing instructions to ensure students can navigate the 24/7 on-demand delivery service with minimal friction.

## Takeaways and Recommendations

1. **Committee Expansion and Operational Shift:** We recommend increasing the committee roster to ensure broader representation across all Columbia schools and adjusting meeting times to maximize attendance. While it is an existing function of SLAC, we also recommend a more robust "ambassador" approach, encouraging SLAC representatives to utilize two-way communications channels with their peers on SLAC-related issues throughout the year. Furthermore, the committee should consider a transition toward a more explicit focus group and/or "market research" format, potentially collaborating with the Assessment team for tailored spin-off sessions.
2. **Enhanced Wayfinding and Spatial Communication:** To address spatial confusion, the Libraries should continue to develop more targeted user guides for specific populations (such as "First Year Student" or "Faculty"), and implement standardized, color-coded signage to clearly define noise and behavior zones across all facilities.
3. **Accessible Technology and Foundational Training:** The Libraries should consider a workshop series titled "Library Hardware, Software, and AI Tools" or similar. These sessions should explicitly highlight "free" resources (University-provided licenses), which remains a significant awareness gap for many students. Additionally, the Libraries should prioritize procuring high-quality overhead scanners that are accessible outside of restricted business hours.
4. **Strategic Communication and Departmental Integration:** The Libraries should expand proactive outreach by integrating directly with departmental listservs and newsletters where possible. The Libraries should emphasize "point-of-need" awareness

of specialized tools by utilizing discipline-specific examples at the exact moments students and faculty require them. This approach acknowledges that while users may never be fully aware of the Libraries' exhaustive resources, we can maximize impact by delivering the right support at the right time.

5. **Institutional and Governance Integration:** We recommend strengthening ties with the University Senate subcommittee to ensure SLAC insights inform broader university policy and that library-specific concerns are elevated to University-level committees.

## Conclusion

The 2025-26 SLAC term demonstrated that students value the Libraries as a supportive environment but face friction in navigating physical and digital resources. By focusing on clearer spatial communication and modernizing technology skills and support in the 2026-27 year, the Libraries can better meet the evolving needs of the Columbia student community.

## Membership

### Leadership

Allison Morrow, Director of Communications, Columbia University Libraries (Chair)  
Veronica Hylton, Graduate School of Arts & Sciences (Co-Chair)

### Columbia University Libraries

Tierra Wilkins Valdés

### Columbia College

Breanna Ellison, FLI Representative  
Fatima Mir, FLI Representative

### School of General Studies

Ben Mizrahi  
Jeanne Lola Fontaine

### Fu Foundation School of Engineering & Applied Science

Constanza Maria Cubilla Amarilla  
Kevin Wu

### Graduate School of Arts & Sciences

Jarea Fang, EALAC Representative  
Kay Kemp

### School of Professional Studies

Dorothy Kam  
Nat Ian McCosh

### School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA)

Garima Sahni  
Santiago Guerrero Archila

**Teachers College**

Daniel Rashid

Maeghan Sill

Jen Chu