



SOLIS

Newsletter

for VSU's Student Organization of LIS



February-March 2026

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Volume 18 Issue 1

SOLIS News

SOLIS Events

We hope everyone has settled into this semester. We have some upcoming events that we'd like to share details of. During spring break, SOLIS will be hosting a Read-A-Thon! Additionally, due to the success of our past Q&A with library professionals that we conducted last Fall, we will be hosting another Q&A! Please stay tuned for further details.

Stay tuned for future SOLIS events! Events will be advertised on our Instagram and shared within the program.

VSU Foundation SOLIS Account

Currently, VSU Foundation SOLIS account has an ending balance of \$980.68. It is used to fund the SOLIS Internship Reimbursement Award: https://www.valdosta.edu/colleges/education/master-of-library-and-information-science/student-resources/internship_reimburse.php and to support various SOLIS community engagement activities.

The main source of SOLIS account revenue is MLIS T-Shirt sale. You may follow this link to order yours: <https://www.valdosta.edu/colleges/education/master-of-library-and-information-science/solis/t-shirt-order-form.pdf>.

SOLIS Social Medias

SOLIS has social media accounts. On these accounts, SOLIS will be engaging with students within the program, sharing resources, hosting events, and more. Please follow us on Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) for the latest SOLIS news.



Both usernames for Instagram and X are solis_vstate

Achievements

SOLIS loves to celebrate your achievements. Keep sending your news about recently awarded scholarships, a conference presentation, a paid internship opportunity, or other exciting news of your scholarly and/or professional achievements to Dr. Ren at xren@valdosta.edu or the current Communications Officer, Ashley Adamian, at amadamian@valdosta.edu as they happen. Thank you!

From your SOLIS President Maria J. Alvarez:

The year has flown by! It has been an inspiring year serving as President of SOLIS! When I first stepped into this role, I was both excited and a little uncertain about what the year would bring. Looking back, I am incredibly proud of what we accomplished together and grateful for the opportunity to grow as a leader while serving such a thoughtful and driven community of future information professionals.

One of our most successful initiatives this year was hosting a Q&A session with library professionals. This event created a welcoming and engaging space for LIS students to ask candid questions about career paths, professional development, and workplace realities. The enthusiasm and participation we saw demonstrated how eager our students are to connect theory to practice. It was especially rewarding to see meaningful dialogue unfold between students and professionals, helping to bridge the gap between graduate coursework and real-world librarianship. Because of its popularity and impact, we are excited to host another Q&A with library professionals this spring, continuing to build those valuable professional connections.

Looking ahead to the spring semester, we are also planning a Read-A-Thon during Spring Break. This event is designed not only to celebrate our shared love of reading but also to encourage community engagement and a bit of fun during what can often be a stressful academic term. By creating opportunities that blend professional growth with community-building, SOLIS continues to support students both academically and personally.

None of this would have been possible without the dedication, creativity, and collaboration of the SOLIS Board. Each member brought unique ideas, energy, and commitment to the table. Leadership is never a solo endeavor, and I am deeply thankful for a team that was willing to brainstorm, plan, and execute our goals throughout the year. I am also grateful to our faculty advisor, Dr. Ren, for her steady guidance and encouragement.

To the future SOLIS President: My advice is that our organization is strongest when leadership is collaborative and inclusive. Don't be afraid to try new ideas; even small initiatives can have a meaningful impact. Communicate openly and often with your Board and create space for every voice to be heard. Most importantly, remember that this role is about service to your fellow students. Listen to what they need, create opportunities for connection, and foster a sense of belonging within the program.

Serving as SOLIS President has been an incredible learning experience, one that strengthened my leadership skills, deepened my commitment to librarianship, and connected me more closely to this wonderful community. Thank you to everyone who participated in our events, supported our initiatives, and contributed to making this year such a success. It has truly been an honor to serve.

From your SOLIS Vice-President Ivy Moe:

Thank you for welcoming me to SOLIS as vice president during the 2025-2026 school year. As I move toward the end of my degree program and enter my tenth year in library work, it's been inspiring to see the dedication to excellence and advocacy in the profession. A highlight was hearing the professional panel of librarians, including VSU graduates, talking about their varied work, and to learn about the library work that SOLIS leadership is already doing while completing their programs. Best of luck to everyone pursuing this important work, and feel free to reach out to me via Teams or email through my December graduation if you want to talk library work.

Alumni Spotlight: John Cropp



John Cropp is pictured featuring a dog.

BIOGRAPHY:

After a career in customer, guest, and patron-facing roles, John found a home in libraries at the age of 39 in 2015. He completed his Bachelor's degree in Communication Studies at the University of Georgia in 2018 and his Master of Library and Information Sciences at Valdosta State University in 2021. He is lucky to work at two amazing libraries: UConn's Homer Babbidge Library and Mansfield (CT) Public Library. John and his family live in northeast Connecticut where they enjoy all of the nature and delicious ice cream that the Quiet Corner has to offer.

1. What drew you to the library field and the MLIS?

A better question might be why I wasn't drawn to the library field sooner. All of my interests indicate that this is where I should be, but I guess that I had to take the long road to get here. That road led through a couple of roles at the University of Georgia where I began applying for every job that I thought might be more interesting. Most of those jobs were at the library. I must have applied for a dozen jobs at UGA Libraries over eight years or so and had three or four interviews before finally landing the Evening Supervisor job in Access Services at the Main Library on the strength of my customer services and managerial experience. It wasn't until I started in my new position that I discovered that working in libraries allowed me to do all of the things that I loved to do – help people, organize things, and learn – for a living. I feel like I haven't worked a day since.

About a week after I started, my supervisor took me on a visit to the other libraries on campus. On the walk back to the van, in the parking lot of the Science Library, she asked if I had considered getting my MLIS and told me about the VSU program. I hadn't even finished my bachelor's degree let alone thought about getting a master's degree. I kept that suggestion with me and applied for the VSU MLIS program about six months after graduating from UGA. It was then that I started calling what I was doing a career. I finally had an answer for what I wanted to be when I grew up.

2. What were your favorite classes while in the MLIS program?

I honestly enjoyed every class that I took at VSU and was disappointed when I started getting to the end of the program and realized that there were so many classes that I wouldn't be able to take. From learning about the Foundations of Library and Information Science to Research Methods to Management of Libraries and Information Centers, I truly loved every class that I took.

3. Did you choose an area of interest for your MLIS? If so, what was your interest and why did you choose it?

I didn't choose an area of interest, but I did try to take classes that were either relevant to the work that I was doing in an academic library and or in other areas that interested me like Archival Theory and Digital Libraries. I was curious to see if I wanted to pursue interest in those areas.

4. What was your favorite course project while receiving your MLIS degree? Why did you enjoy it, and what did you learn from it?

My favorite project was creating a digital library in my Digital Libraries class. I worked with a partner to develop a digital of vinyl records which was a lot of fun. We each chose records that were favorites or fun, organized them into categories, and documented them. Studying the records to pull out metadata was a blast. I have warm memories of laying albums--
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Alumni Spotlight: John Cropp (cont.)

and artwork out on my living room floor to photograph them with consistent sunlight so that the webpages looked good. It was a fun way to learn about metadata and information organization.

5. What is your current library position? Have you held other library positions, and if so, what?

I have two positions: I am an Access Services Associate at the University of Connecticut Library's Homer Babbidge Library and I am a part-time Librarian at Mansfield (CT) Public Library.

My first job in libraries was the Evening Supervisor at UGA's Main Library in Athens. In the spring of 2020, I relocated to my home state of Connecticut to take a similar job at UConn Library. After completing my MLIS, I was hired to be a part-time Librarian Quinebaug Valley Community College and had a wonderful mentor of a manager who challenged me with new projects and assignments each week. That allowed me to grow very quickly into the librarian role. About six months later, I was offered the Interim Head of Access Services position at UConn Library. It was certainly the most challenging period of my career in librarianship, but it allowed me to grow professionally, gain first-hand experience in library management, and establish relationships with colleagues from across the library. When that appointment ended, I became the interim subject specialist for the College of Education and also established the Visitors Services part of the newly renamed Access and Visitors Services where I create outreach events and services for the non-undergraduate communities. In addition, I manage instruction space reservations and chair a committee focused on improving learning and meeting spaces in the library.

At the start of 2024, I took a part-time job as a Digital Navigator in my local library which gave me a chance to work with community members in a public library and show them how to use electronic devices. A year later, I was promoted to part-time Librarian where I get to work with the Youth and Adult Services Librarians on programs like storytime and author talks. I've also helped create new programs at the library like a Big Kid Book Club and Read with Dogs program.

6. What are some of your favorite parts about your position?

Helping people has been my favorite part of all of the jobs that I have ever had, and I am so grateful that I get to help so many different with so many different questions and challenges at my two libraries. It is also incredibly rewarding to create programs and events to raise awareness of services and resources and to have patrons respond to them.

7. How has what you learned while getting your MLIS degree directly affected or been applied to your work?

I think that my coursework at VSU has informed all of my work in some way. I have an understanding and appreciation for each part and each department in the library and it helps me work with colleagues that are working in different areas than me.

8. Do you have any advice for upcoming graduates on how to navigate the job search and/or the field as a new graduate?

Maintain a positive attitude, accept every challenge as an opportunity to grow, and apply-up for any advanced position that interests you. If you think that you might be able to do it, apply for it. Let the hiring department decide if you are right for the job and then decide if the job and situation are right for you. Do what you love, love what you do, and gravitate towards people that love what they do, too.

9. Is there anything else you would like to add?

I think that working on my MLIS at VSU allowed me to have a journey through librarianship that was unique to me but also unique to each of my classmates and that made it more interesting. We were all learning together but in our own spaces and situations which made the online conversations and writing submissions even richer. Every library is different and there is not a template that anyone can follow that will suit all or even any situation. Our journeys through VSU reflected that and that is wonderful.

SOLIS website: <http://www.valdosta.edu/colleges/education/master-of-library-and-information-science/solis/>

Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Brandi Porter



BIOGRAPHY:

Dr. Porter earned her Ph.D. in Information Science from Nova Southeastern University and a MLIS from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She completed both of these degrees via online, mostly asynchronous, learning environments. She also has a certificate in Instructional Design from the Online Learning Consortium. She knows firsthand the value that quality online education can provide, and as such she strives to offer engaging and meaningful courses in this environment.

Prior to her current role at VSU, she spent 25 years as a practicing academic librarian. She was a library director for four different colleges and universities and worked as a department head for a major research university. For the last five years or so, she has served as an adjunct instructor for several different ALA-accredited library programs. Beyond libraries, she has experience running a university bookstore, overseeing academic resource units such as tutoring and accommodated testing, and leading online faculty development initiatives. Some of her favorite projects as a library director were opportunities to renovate library spaces to make them more inviting and accessible to students.

1. What would you describe as your focus/concentration within the MLIS field?

My research interests include management, information retrieval, reference, and information literacy. I've also taught courses on public libraries, academic libraries, grant writing, fundraising, and research methods. My dissertation was on Information retrieval strategies of millennial undergraduate students in Web and library database searches.

2. What are some lessons or tips you have learned throughout your career?

In terms of library management, I've learned that operating with transparency and authenticity is critical to leading successful teams. I also try to impart to future librarians that demonstrating library value through meaningful and comprehensive assessment is the new norm for libraries. Measuring impact doesn't have to be a scary endeavor, and assessing the impact of how well libraries meet user needs is worth doing. Lastly, what I have learned about online teaching is that students value opportunities to engage in practical, real-world experiences blended into coursework.

3. What were some unexpected challenges you faced throughout your career?

Initially moving into a director role only a couple of years post degree was a significant challenge as I encountered some staff who did not want to work for someone so young. Luckily, I had a great mentor who encouraged me to find my own leadership style in the process. I can't say enough about the value of mentors in this field. However, the biggest challenge that I faced professionally and personally was having to resign from a library management position due to a workplace illness. I've tried to pay this knowledge forward by writing and presenting professionally about my experience in the hopes of providing resources for other library staff who may encounter similar circumstances. Thankfully though, this situation led me to a new career teaching future librarians, and I am grateful for the opportunity to work for VSU in the MLIS Program.

Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Brandi Porter

4. What are some resources you recommend for professionals within the MLIS field?

Broadly, I would say choose something to get involved in professionally to continue one's growth post-degree. Some options include memberships, working groups or committees. These can take place through local or regional consortia, state library associations, or national organizations like ALA, ACRL, or PLA. If one works for a college or university volunteer to serve on internal committees. Relationship-building is very important in this line of work, and you never know what opportunities may come from doing so.

5. Do you have any advice for upcoming graduates on how to navigate the job search and/or enter the field as a new graduate?

Yes, sell your abilities to hit the ground running. I have colleagues who are library directors and they often tell me that what they see missing in graduates is that they enter the field theory-heavy and not practice-ready. I would encourage students to use their e-portfolios with an eye toward employment (in addition to addressing the program level learning outcomes required for it). Think about including assignments that demonstrate your ability to perform work, conduct analysis, and/or reflect upon application of theory. Employers connect best in interviews with concrete examples of one's work. Obviously, this may be easier for graduates who also have experience working in libraries. However, assignments that have given you an opportunity to learn from a librarian in the field or practice decision-making like case studies or simulate a real-world library issue, can all be used to describe your ability to perform tasks in the field.

Support the Student Organization of Library and Information Science (SOLIS) by ordering your own T-shirt with the VSU and MLIS insignias!

Proceeds of sales in years have funded ALA conference registrations for students, travel reimbursements for SOLIS officers representing SOLIS at GLA conferences, a reception for the travelling rare books exhibit on loan from the Remnant Trust, a 15th anniversary celebration in downtown Valdosta, and many SOLIS activities such as virtual 5k, and t-shirt design contest. The proceeds of sales will be the main funding source for a newly created SOLIS scholarship starting from Fall 2021. Shirts are sold at \$10 each at face-to-face events such as GLA conferences and previous New Student Orientations.

SOLIS T-Shirt Order Form

Yes, I want to support SOLIS! Please send me _____ (number) of shirts.

Please fill in the oval next to your preferred t-shirt **design**:



Please indicate the **quantity** for each size:

Small _____ Medium _____ Large _____ X-Large _____ 2X-Large* _____ 3X-Large* _____
**sizes not available for white t-shirt*

Order of one (1) shirt is \$20 (includes processing and shipping via USPS). Order of 2 or more shirts is \$15 per shirt (processing and shipping included)

Total enclosed: _____

Check payment only. Make check payable to **MLIS Foundation**. Allow two to four weeks to receive your t-shirt(s).

Your shipping address:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Email Address: _____

Please mail this form with your check to:

Dr. Xiaoai Ren

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