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KU alumna to head Spencer Research Library

June 18, 2009

University of Kansas alumna Beth M. Whittaker will become the next head of KU's Kenneth Spencer Research Library, effective Nov. 1.

Whittaker is head of special collections cataloging at Ohio State University, a position she has held since 2000. She has also been a librarian for original cataloging of special collections, manuscripts and archives at Cushing Memorial Library at Texas A&M University.



"I am pleased Beth has accepted my offer to join KU Libraries as the head of Spencer Research Library," said Lorraine J. Haricombe, dean of libraries. "She is nationally regarded for her tireless work to promote use of rare books, manuscripts and archival collections to improve teaching and learning and advance scholarship. Furthermore, Beth has a strong record of working with others to develop and apply innovative strategies including many that call on the use of emerging technologies. I trust that she will use these talents to great end at her alma mater."

Whittaker was appointed as editor of RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts and Cultural Heritage, which is the premier journal in the field, in 2008. Additionally, she is active in the rare books and manuscripts section of the Association of College and Research Libraries. She holds bachelor's and master's degrees in history from KU, as well as master's degree in library and information science from the University of Texas-Austin.

Sheryl Williams, who has been serving as interim head of Spencer Research Library, will become the first curator for collections at the library, also effective Nov. 1. Williams also will continue as curator of the library's Kansas Collection.

"Sherry brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to this new leadership role, which will encompass oversight for all of the holdings of this world-class library," said Haricombe. "She has served with distinction for three decades as curator of the Spencer library's Kansas Collection, was a very successful university archivist for much of the 1990s while attending to such issues as the rise of electronic records and was a much-respected bibliographer for United States history for the KU Libraries during much of this decade."

In 2007, Williams agreed to serve as interim head of Spencer Research Library. During this time she has led several new initiatives to lead the staff in expanding services and improving awareness of the Spencer library's resources to support teaching and learning — on campus and for the wider community.

Williams' achievements at the Spencer library are many, including her initiatives in leading several externally funded projects to raise awareness of the library's world-renowned collections. She began that work in the 1980s and has continued to seek opportunities to expand such efforts. The two most recent examples of her initiatives are the major collaboration that she led with the Kansas State Historical Society to create the award-winning "Territorial Kansas Online" (www.territorialkansasonline.com) and, in just the last year, her work to gain an award of funds to preserve important films from the Centron collection (www.news.ku.edu/2008/june/12/filmgrant.shtml).

"Sherry has shown all of us how a very successful librarian and archivist can lead change over many years, sustain a commitment to innovation and move others to achieve continuous improvement in how we engage teachers and learners from all walks of life," said Haricombe. "I am grateful for all that Sherry has done for KU and for scholarship, and I know that we will see her undertake many welcome initiatives in this new and vitally important role."

The Spencer Research Library, KU's archival, manuscript, rare book and regional history library, is located at 1450 Poplar Drive, in the center of KU's Lawrence campus.

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