



Responsible AI for academic libraries

Igniting the power within existing workflows, while keeping librarians in control

Across higher education, conversations about AI are no longer theoretical. [The Pulse of the Library 2025](#), a survey conducted by Clarivate of thousands of librarians worldwide, reports that **67% of libraries are now exploring or implementing AI**, yet most describe themselves as still in the early stages of that journey. What's striking is not just the growing interest in AI, but the way **librarians are approaching it: thoughtfully, pragmatically and with a clear focus on professional values.**

For many institutions, the question isn't whether to explore AI, but how to begin in a way that is responsible, sustainable and aligned with the work librarians

already do. That's where the Alma library management system and its integrated Primo discovery experience offer an ideal starting point: Academic AI capabilities that are developed in collaboration with librarians. Embedded within familiar, time-tested workflows, they are designed to augment professional expertise. It's all supported by Clarivate Academic AI, providing a secure, scalable and unified foundation for AI across the Clarivate enterprise.

Read on to learn more about the ways responsibly developed academic AI integrations can advance your innovation journey.

Reducing complexity with AI built into core systems

One theme that emerges consistently in librarian conversations is that AI is most effective when it's integrated into core systems, rather than introduced as a standalone experiment. Tools that require new platforms, new governance models or significant retraining can add risk and complexity at a moment when staff capacity is already stretched.

Alma and Primo take a more incremental approach. Their AI capabilities are built directly into the workflows libraries already know and rely on, making them **low risk, high impact entry points** for institutions beginning their AI journey. Instead of asking libraries to rethink their infrastructure, these tools help libraries take meaningful first steps at their own pace.

Supporting discovery, research and institutional missions

For many libraries, the most visible opportunity for AI is in discovery and research support for students. In fact, the Pulse of the Library 2025 shows that academic librarians' primary objectives for AI use are in "Supporting student learning" (64%) and "Improving content discovery" (64%), both up significantly over 2024. Perhaps unsurprising is a simultaneous shift in reported missions, with "Student success" overtaking "Research support" as the primary goal of the library.

In 2025, Primo introduced its academic AI-powered Primo Research Assistant to enhance the student research experience by helping them better understand, explore and navigate library-curated content.

Primo Research Assistant offers a responsible alternative to general-purpose chatbots and non-academic sources that pose a risk to academic integrity. Grounded in the extensive Ex Libris Central Discovery Index, Primo Research Assistant offers users an AI-driven research tool with academic results, source citations and the ability to submit natural language search queries. It provides an AI-generated summary based on top-ranked library results, along with direct links to full texts and a complete list of search results, marrying users' expectations for instant answers with traditional academic rigor.

"Even though we're using AI, we still want our students to be checking and verifying what the AI has done. Primo Research Assistant makes it fairly easy to do this."

Sue Stevens, Head of Library Systems, Cardiff University

By providing contextual guidance directly within Primo, Primo Research Assistant enables users to navigate and explore library-curated content with confidence, keeping library resources and librarian expertise at the forefront. Its embedded approach ensures that research support is delivered within the familiar environment that users already trust, making it easy for both staff and users to adopt without disrupting existing workflows. This thoughtful integration is designed to strengthen research outcomes and reinforce the library's role as a central partner in academic work.

"The most effective AI tools are the ones that meet people where they already are. When AI is embedded in discovery, it helps users move forward with their research without changing how they engage with the library."

Michael Gonzalez, University Librarian, University of Technology Sydney



Improving metadata quality with human oversight at the center

Whether supporting research and learning or preserving institutional heritage, the collection is the heart of the library with academic librarians as guardians and guides to it. Librarians face growing pressure to maintain accuracy across diverse formats, languages and sources, ensuring that no metadata gap or error hinders discoverability. Behind the scenes, AI is also playing an important role in helping libraries manage this growing complexity. The **Alma Metadata Assistant** reflects a model many librarians are actively seeking: technology that augments professional judgment rather than automating it away.

By assisting with routine metadata tasks, the Metadata Assistant helps reduce manual effort while preserving human oversight. Alma Metadata Assistant product and development teams worked in collaboration with librarians worldwide to develop a solution that can automate routine tasks such as generating subject headings, summaries and language tags, while preserving cataloging standards and librarian confidence in accuracy.

"With this powerful tool [Alma Metadata Assistant], we can improve our efficiency and workflow, and guarantee at the same time expert interpretation when needed and necessary to oversee and ensure the quality of the metadata."

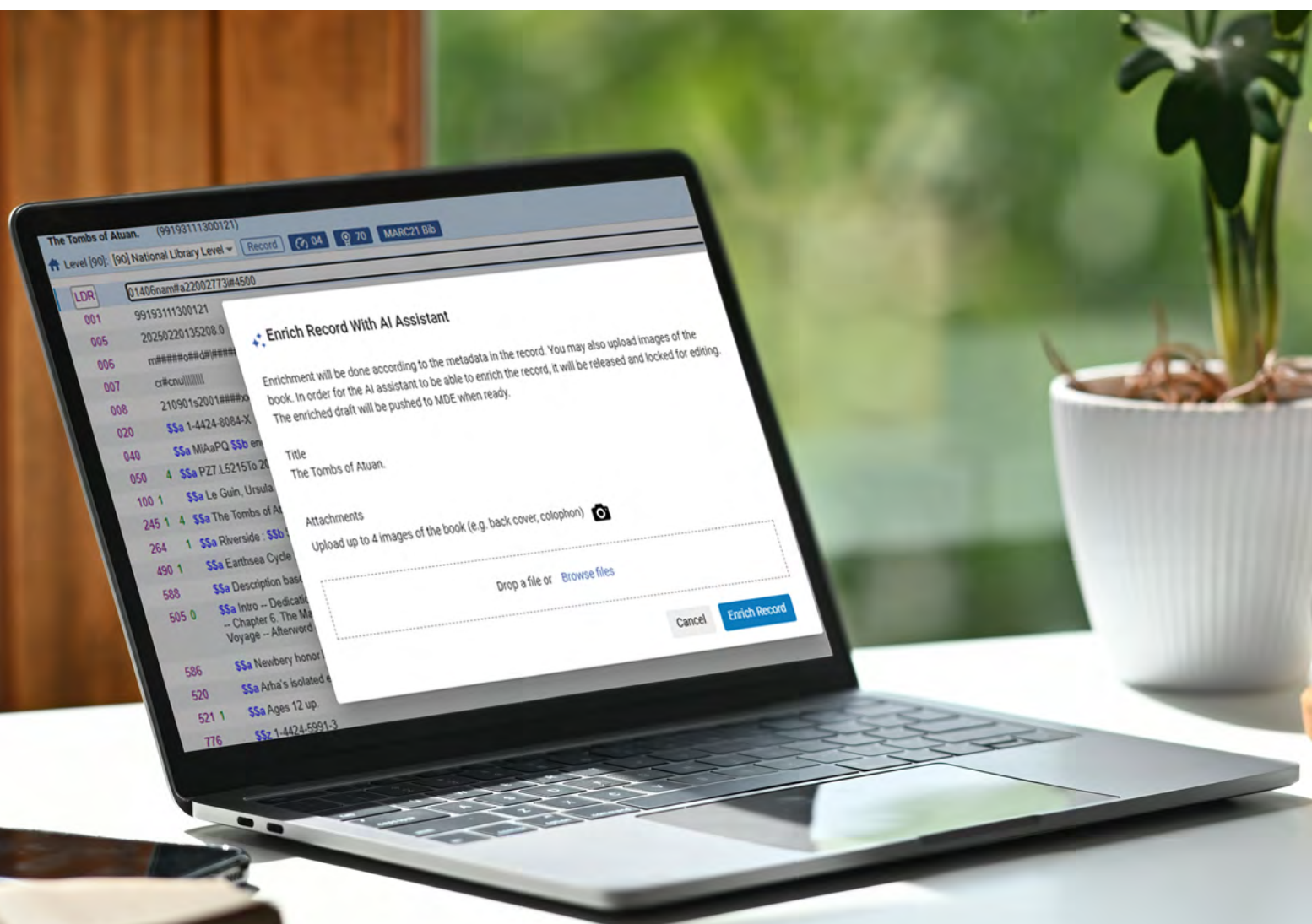
Mingyan Li, Metadata Librarian, University of Illinois Chicago



The metadata assistant neatly balances technology with human oversight. It operates within a mediated workflow, where librarians retain full control over metadata decisions. Academic AI analyzes bibliographic data and images, like book covers or tables of contents, and suggests structured metadata aligned with MARC 21. Human catalogers accept, refine or reject these suggestions, ensuring that professional judgment remains central to the process. Features like opt-in activation and dedicated roles for AI-assisted cataloging ensure that libraries can adopt the technology at their own pace.

"AI can't replace the expertise of librarians, but with thoughtful community feedback and careful design, it becomes a powerful partner—helping catalogers start faster, reduce manual effort, and unlock access to hidden collections."

Lili Daie, Alma Product Manager and Librarian



Maximizing value in a budget conscious environment

Budget pressure remains a defining reality for academic libraries. In fact, the Pulse of the Library 2025 **identifies budget constraints as the top challenge facing libraries today, cited by 62% of respondents**. As a result, libraries are prioritizing solutions that are cost effective, scalable and capable of delivering clear value without requiring new layers of investment.

"We have to remember AI is not a toy and we shouldn't just be using it just to plug stuff in and see what happens. We should be careful to use it for real applications that will have real benefits and not to treat it casually."

Elizabeth York, Electronic Resources Librarian, Rutgers University

By embedding AI capabilities within existing workflows, Alma and Primo unlock efficiencies and ROI from tools libraries already license. Consider Alma Metadata Assistant's ability to scale editing of metadata, making the breadth of library resources more discoverable. By streamlining repetitive tasks, Alma helps staff spend more time on higher impact activities like supporting collection strategy, engagement and collaboration across campus, without increasing operational burden.

On the discovery side, Primo Research Assistant enhances research support by guiding users through library curated content more effectively. Because it is built into Primo, it strengthens discovery without introducing new platforms to manage or maintain. Libraries can enrich research experiences while maximizing the return on their existing discovery investment.

Enabling innovation and staying future ready

Innovation has always been part of librarianship, but the pace and scope of change facing academic libraries continues to expand. According to the Pulse of the Library 2025, **49% of librarians identify the ability to innovate as the most important future skill**, reflecting a growing emphasis on responding to evolving stakeholder expectations.

In this environment, innovation isn't about chasing technology for its own sake. It's about having systems that allow libraries to evolve deliberately by adapting services and experimenting responsibly.

"People really underestimate the role of libraries in change management and in practice change, particularly around new research methods."

Michael Gonzalez, University Librarian, University of Technology Sydney

Alma and Primo support this kind of innovation by providing a stable, extensible foundation on which libraries can build. Importantly, innovation within Alma and Primo is shaped by the library community itself. New capabilities — including AI enhanced features — reflect how libraries are actually working, teaching and supporting research today.

Alma and Primo are designed to enable libraries to advance at their own pace by providing the tools to respond thoughtfully when change arrives.

Start smart and build from there

The Pulse of the Library 2025 also highlights a broader reality: libraries are navigating innovation under real constraints, particularly around budgets and staffing. In that context, AI initiatives need to demonstrate value quickly and fit within existing investments.

Because AI is embedded directly into Alma and Primo, libraries can begin exploring new capabilities without launching complex pilots or committing to unfamiliar platforms. It's a way to start smart — building confidence, skills and impact incrementally, guided by librarian expertise at every step.

AI adoption doesn't have to be disruptive to be meaningful. For many academic libraries, the most effective path forward is one that feels familiar, responsible and firmly rooted in the systems and values they already trust.

Curious to see it in action?

Request your personalized Alma and Primo demo and get a guided walkthrough with one of our library specialists.

[Get in touch here.](#)