Carceral Labor and Academic Libraries: Investigating the Library Furniture

Kevin Adams and Maria Planansky

In this article the authors provide context for and detail the Alfred University Libraries' investigation into the libraries' relationship with manufacturing prison labor. The investigation utilized a patron furniture audit to collect furniture and manufacturer data. This research project demystifies the university library's relationship to prison labor, with an eye toward future steps needed to address this relationship; it seeks to understand the following: the makeup of our patron furniture; our institution's procurement policies, preferred sourcing, and legal requirements for purchasing; and the manufacturers' relationships to prison labor. Findings are shared and recommendations are made for divesting from the prison industrial complex.

Introduction

While moving furniture in preparation for the morning opening, a librarian glanced down and saw a chair's manufacturing label reading Corcraft, a known New York State Department of Corrections manufacturer that uses prison labor to produce its goods (Corcraft, n.d.). This was not surprising; higher education's involvement with the prison industrial complex (PIC) is well documented (Burke, 2020, 2021). The State University of New York (SUNY) system's procurement policies, following state law, list the department of corrections manufacturer as the top preferred vendor (SUNY, n.d.).

Incarcerated laborers in New York make as little as 10 cents per hour and are not protected by United States federal labor laws (Prison Policy Initiative, 2017). The prison industrial complex disproportionately impacts people with marginalized identities (Alexander, 2012). This type of exploitation, racism, and oppression is contradictory to the values of Alfred University Libraries (AU Libraries) (AU Libraries, 2023). As members of the AU Libraries Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression working group, the authors conducted an audit of furniture in public library spaces to better understand our libraries' relationship to prison labor.

Background and Context

Alfred University is a small (1,260 FTE undergraduate and 418 FTE graduate students) comprehensive university comprised of non-statutory (i.e., private) and statutory (i.e., publicly supported) units. The university offers degrees through its SUNY statutory college, the New York State College of Ceramics, which includes the School of Art and Design and the Inamori

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School of Engineering, as well as through its private-side programs, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the College of Business, and the School of Graduate and Continuing Studies. AU Libraries support all programs through unified services housed in Scholes Library (statutory) and Herrick Memorial Library (non-statutory). This uniquely situates AU Libraries to explore their purchasing regulations and policies, and how those impact the state and private aspects of our institution, with implications for both public and private academic libraries.

We were able to conduct this research with the support of our library administration, thanks in large part to their commitment to the libraries' anti-racism and anti-oppression initiatives. AU Libraries made this commitment in the early fall of 2020 and has laid the path for us to have numerous conversations about our libraries' relationships to systemic racism (AU Libraries, 2023).

At the outset of our research, we knew that AU Libraries possessed prison-labor-made furniture and that we wished to discontinue purchasing from vendors utilizing prison labor. Even with these understandings, there was much to investigate. This research project is primarily about demystifying the university libraries' relationship to prison labor, with an eye toward future steps needed to address this relationship. To do this, we set out to understand the following: the makeup of our patron furniture; our institution's procurement policies, preferred sourcing, and legal requirements for purchasing; and the manufacturers' relationships to prison labor.

Literature Review

This literature review provides a background understanding of the PIC, the intersections of the PIC and social justice issues, and the relationship between academic institutions (including libraries) and the PIC.

Prison Industrial Complex

The U.S. PIC is larger than that of any other nation, with nearly two million people (roughly the population of Nebraska) being held in prisons, jails, correctional facilities, and immigration detention facilities. This includes 1,042,000 individuals in state prisons and 208,000 in federal prisons and jails (Prison Policy Initiative & Wagner, 2023). The growth of the prison industrial complex over the last thirty years has been written about by critical theorists and activists such as Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Michelle Alexander, and Angela Davis (Alexander, 2012; Davis, 2003; Gilmore, 2007; Gilmore et al., 2022). Each of these thinkers highlights the systemic racism involved in the explosive growth of the PIC.

Approaching the PIC from a library science perspective, Jeanie Austin, a librarian, activist, and scholar, points out that the PIC operates to police "along lines of sexuality and gender conformity," as well as racialized ones. Austin connects prison expansion to the militarization of the police and new surveillance tactics. When pulling from Alexander's work, Austin highlights that the disproportionate policing of drug offenses along racial lines has led to 46.4% of federal convictions being drug offenses (2022). This percentage leads to higher rates of incarceration for Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC), even though drug use has never been documented to be disproportionately distributed across race. Alexander points out that at the time of her writing, a higher percentage of the United States' Black population had been incarcerated than was incarcerated during apartheid in South Africa (2012).

The PIC consists of numerous systems of incarceration: prisons, jails, juvenile detention centers, state supervision, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention (Austin, 2022). In this paper, we will focus solely on prisons, and specifically on prison labor.

Prison Labor

As of 2022, the United States holds 1.2 million people in state and federal prisons with two thirds of that population working as incarcerated laborers. A report produced jointly by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and Global Human Rights Center at the University of Chicago's Law School (GHRC) states that these workers do not have protections against exploitation, are often not paid minimum wage, and "are under the complete control of their employers" (2022, p. 5). Prison labor remains legalized by the Thirteenth Amendment, which states, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime where of the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction" (U.S. Const.). Legal scholars have argued that the disproportionate impact on BIPOC can be traced through the history of slavery, Black Codes, convict leasing, chain gangs, and Jim Crow laws (ACLU & GHRC, 2022; Hammad, 2019; Whitehouse, 2017). This current manifestation and its impact on BIPOC reflects the white supremacy and racism that is embedded in U.S. carceral systems (Hammad, 2019; Leung, 2018; Whitehouse, 2017). McLennan traces the legal, political, and social history of carceral labor to its earlier iterations in the Northwest Territory and later all non-Southern states. She expands on these histories, arguing that systems of carceral labor existed prior to the Thirteenth Amendment:

> Although the Thirteenth Amendment underwrote the drive to push convicted freed people back into bondage and hard labor, it also constitutionalized a brutal system of penal involuntary servitude that had been operating in the United States for more than four decades before the Civil War. Indeed, the amendment was as much a capstone as a foundation (2023).

Prison labor is coerced labor. Over 76% of incarcerated laborers face punishment for not working; this punishment can take the form of solitary confinement, loss of opportunity for lowered sentences, and loss of family visitations (ACLU & GHRC, 2022). Dominique Morgan, a former inmate shared with NPR:

> I was diagnosed with HIV right when I got into the prison, so I would have days where I physically did not have the energy to stand and work in the kitchen for 12 hours. But I had to work. You don't get days off. You don't get to have sick days. And if I didn't go to work, it was a rule violation (Garcia, 2020).

Morgan's perspective is one that is underrepresented in the scholarship. It is uncommon for the perspectives of incarcerated people and how they perceive their own relationship to prison labor to be highlighted. Wilson, Aggarwal, Groccia, and Villaronga are seeking to fill this gap in academic study with their project, *The Work and Us* (2023). Wilson, a Black and queer incarcerated writer, activist, and student, is leading the group in asking incarcerated people why they work and how they feel about it. Preliminary results have been shared

as the full survey results are forthcoming. The preliminary results are complex, as "these experiences, in turn, indicate that a one-size-fits-all approach focused on labor may not be the best way to improve the material conditions of imprisoned people, and will certainly not get us any closer to abolishing the prison–industrial complex"(Wilson et al., 2023). As Wilson et al. state, the root cause of dehumanization and exploitation is not the work, but in the prison itself (2023).

With such a lack of perspective in scholarly research to inform leaders in the carceral system, prison labor can be justified under the guise of rehabilitation and reduction of recidivism. The research to support reduced recidivism through prison labor is minimal but includes a recent evaluation that indicates that people who worked in prison had lower recidivism rates. Other studies have found no significant positive effects of prison labor on recidivism (Duwe & Henry-Nickie, 2021).

History and Afro-American and African Studies professor Heather Ann Thompson, quoted in an article in *The Economist*, said, "the vast majority of prison labor is not even cloaked in the idea of rehabilitation" (The Incarcerated Workforce, 2017). Legal scholar Lan Cao argues that prison labor has lost its rehabilitative purpose as is demonstrated by the profit-driven decisions in prison labor and its unsafe working conditions (2019). Cao gives the example of inmates who thought they were going to a drug rehabilitation center, but instead, arrived at "prison labor camps for private companies, such as meat processing factories that sold slaughtered chicken to big-name brands" (2019, p. 29). Oftentimes, decisions in managing prison labor are driven by profits and not the "benefits" of said work for incarcerated individuals (Cao, 2019; Hammad, 2019; Whitehouse, 2017). Incarcerated laborers produce over $2 billion of goods annually and provide over $9 billion worth of prison maintenance services annually, while receiving little to no pay for their labor (ACLU & GHRC, 2022).

Prison labor wages are abysmal, with minimum wages averaging $0.13 per hour and higher paying jobs averaging up to $1.30 per hour; many workers are paid nothing at all (ACLU & GHRC, 2022). Even when paid, workers often don't even get to keep these low wages: "Across the country, prisons deduct as much as 80 percent from incarcerated people's paychecks for court-imposed taxes, family support, restitution, and room and board, among other fees" (ACLU & GHRC, 2022, p. 59). Money that is made and kept by incarcerated laborers is usually then spent on necessities sold by the prison commissary, such as hygiene products, medicine, and food. Many laborers find that their wages do not allow them to provide for their own basic needs (ACLU & GHRC, 2022).

Prison labor is not only compulsory and personally unbeneficial, but also often unsafe. Laborers perform dangerous jobs like fighting fires, repairing sewage lines, blacksmithing, and working in construction (ACLU & GHRC, 2022; *Open Letter: CUNY Divest from Corcraft*, 2020). Laborers don't always receive the necessary training or protective gear to safely work on the job, and most incarcerated laborers are not protected by the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) (ACLU & GHRC, 2022). It is important to note that this lack of protection disproportionately impacts Women of Color (WOC). As one incarcerated WOC observes of the plantation-style labor at a women's penitentiary in Texas, "whites on horses—armed as Black and Brown bodies tend crops," and that "white women are never assigned to the fields due to their perceived vulnerability" (Wilson et al., 2023).

Finally, the arguments that prison labor reduces recidivism and benefits incarcerated workers in any way may hold water were these workers able to benefit from their experiences

after their releases. It may seem that these work experiences could aid the formerly incarcerated in obtaining work following their releases but, unfortunately, this is not the case. Most prison labor jobs do not provide marketable skills or the resources to market any skills that are beneficial for re-employment. Some prisons provide vocational training programs, but these often do not train incarcerated laborers in the relevant and current practices of the given field (ACLU & GHRC, 2022).

Prison labor occurs across three types of prisons: federal, state, and private. The types of labor can be divided further into three types of services: work that facilitates prison operations, work that manufactures goods within prisons to be sold externally for profit, and work that occurs outside of prisons for the benefit of the state or private companies (Whitehouse, 2017). When examining the relationship between academic institutions and prison labor, we will focus on the labor that occurs outside of prisons as well as for the manufacturing of goods within prisons.

Prison Labor, Academic Institutions and Libraries

Much of the literature related to prison labor and libraries has focused on databases and digitization, with a smaller portion of the conversation focusing on library furniture production. By contrast, much of the current literature pertaining to prison labor and higher education in general relates to furniture production and services.

In 2015, *Mother Jones* ran an article by Shane Bauer that reveals the relationship between prison labor, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, government documents, and genealogical records. Prisoners in Utah work for anywhere from receiving no compensation to receiving only $1.75 per hour to digitize documents that are searchable on FamilySearch (2015). Similarly, Logsdon identified that prison labor has been used to digitize maps, newspapers, yearbooks, and other materials, connecting this trend to libraries. Logsdon identified 12 states where prisons provide digitization services: Alaska, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Maryland, Minnesota, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, and Utah. Drawing on critical prison studies, Logsdon's research aims to better understand the way that prison labor factors into the logic of power and capital in the age of mass digitization (2019a, 2019b).

In our review, we found that much less research has been done on the relationship between libraries and prison manufacturing. One of the instigators of our investigation was a blog post focused on libraries, in which Carrie Wade asked:

> Are we destined to become rapidly passé and wasteful at the suffering of society's most vulnerable and exploited workforce–those incarcerated folks forced to assemble, stitch, hammer, screw, and staple all the bits together below minimum wage so we can have our luxurious and loud palaces of learning? (2021)

Wade argues that to destroy the legacy of white supremacy, libraries, amongst other institutions, must abolish their connections to prison labor. More has been written about the relationship between prison labor and academic institutions writ large. Burke, in an article published in *Inside Higher Ed*, wrote: "Every U.S. state except Alaska features some sort of correctional enterprise, where inmates make goods like license plates and desk chairs. And in several states, public universities are required to buy from those entities" (2020).

We know that New York is one of those states. Other higher education institutions with similar requirements include University of Virginia, University of Wisconsin, and University of Maryland (Burke, 2020). Beyond this study, we found no extensive scholarship or comprehensive list of universities required to purchase goods produced using prison labor. This information is often documented on university procurement pages and in state laws. Documented pushback to this type of requirement from faculty, staff, and students includes SUNY Brockport, SUNY University Faculty Senate, Virginia Tech Graduate and Professional Student Senate, and the City University of New York (CUNY) system (Burke, 2021; SUNY University Faculty Senate Operations Committee, 2024; Virginia Tech Graduate and Professional Student Senate, 2021).

Perhaps the most thorough investigation of the relationship between prison labor and higher education was conducted and published in a 2020 open letter by CUNY for Abolition and Safety (*Open Letter*, 2020). The open letter was signed by elected officials, undergraduate and graduate organizations, faculty organizations, community organizations, and other higher education groups. The letter, addressed to then-New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo and CUNY administrators, focuses on Corcraft, the New York State Correctional Industries brand name for labor and manufacturing provided by incarcerated workers referenced in our paper's introduction.

Between 2009 and 2018, CUNY purchased over $245,000 in products from Corcraft, which pays incarcerated laborers between $0.16 and $0.65 an hour. Laborers produce classroom and office furniture, among other products that are sold to State University of New York (SUNY) and CUNY (*Open Letter*, 2020). Documentation, obtained via Freedom of Information Act Law (FOIL) request, of purchases from Corcraft also indicate that SUNY and CUNY pay for incarcerated laborers to conduct hazardous services, such as asbestos removal (*Corcraft Purchases—CUNY / SUNY*, n.d.). The letter focuses on the health and safety of those working for Corcraft, highlighting on-the-job injuries and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on incarcerated people.

In conjunction with the open letter, the Release Aging People in Prisons (RAPP) Campaign and CUNY for Abolition and Safety held a press conference, *Divest & Decarcerate*, in which panelists shared their perspectives on incarcerated labor (CUNY For Abolition & Safety, 2021). Amongst these panelists were formerly incarcerated people who had worked for Corcraft during their time of incarceration. The panelists addressed the historic racism of the Thirteenth Amendment and prison labor; the need to raise awareness about mass incarceration while emphasizing an abolitionist paradigm over reformism; the forced labor utilized by Corcraft and strategies for divesting from the company; inmates' lack of opportunities for parole; the importance of collective organizing as well as freeing political prisoners; and the transfer of government funding from education systems to that of incarceration. CUNY for Abolition and Safety demand "that CUNY, as a public institution that asserts they stand for racial justice, ceases to partake in the exploitation and death of our communities" (*Open Letter*, 2020).

Our essay contributes to this literature by more clearly explaining the relationship between academic library furniture and manufacturing prison labor. Our investigation includes an examination of relationships with state correctional facilities, while also exploring the lesser documented relationship between academic libraries and private companies benefiting from prison labor. We build on this literature by answering the question: how do procurement policies at the university level play into this relationship?

Methodology

Furniture Audit

The initial step of our investigation into prison labor and its connections to AU Libraries was understanding the makeup of the current furniture within our institutional buildings, Herrick Memorial Library and Scholes Library. In considering the furniture within these buildings, we categorized the furniture into three distinct groups: patron furniture, office furniture, and resource shelving. Patron furniture was a natural starting point; it is a highly visible area where purchases are made regularly unlike resource shelving, which is often static, and office furniture, which includes furniture and objects brought in from staff people's homes. In theory, patron furniture purchases can be traced to regular university purchasing.

While patron furniture was a natural focus, it did have its challenges. AU Libraries' patron furniture is flexible by nature and mobile as it can be moved depending on the day-to-day needs of the building or events. Relatedly, university courses take place in Herrick and Scholes, and building spaces can be reserved for activities and clubs. This makes multiple areas off limits to any type of furniture tracking for a discrete period of time.

We had a systematic approach to the audit. Working as a pair, we inventoried each library separately and one floor at a time. We divided spaces up according to the building's blueprints. To account for "furniture creep," we blocked out time to cover an entire floor per inventory session. For transitional areas or high traffic areas, we took pictures to ensure we didn't miscount items that could be moved if we were unable to access the space later. We logged inventory in real time on a spreadsheet that included the library building, floor, room number or wing, type of furniture, a robust description of each item's physical attributes, and, if present, the corporation listed on the manufacturing label. If there were any duplicate items, we recorded the total number of these items and noted the room or wing. During this inventory, we took photos of key furniture pieces that were later uploaded to the spreadsheet to provide a visual reference of the written description. We were as descriptive as possible due to the sheer quantity of furniture, and input pictures of furniture and furniture labels alongside data. The audit spanned all of February 2022.

After the audit was completed, we identified gaps in the data and determined how to best fill them. A large gap was due to manufacturing labels with incomplete information. If there was any identifying information, such as a patent number, we looked up the patent holder to see what company or individual had submitted or registered the patent. Some items of furniture had no labels at all, likely because they had peeled off, been destroyed, or been altered. We were able to address this gap by identifying many items in our visual data of furniture pieces. We cross-referenced recent purchases with communications regarding purchase orders to fill in affiliated manufacturing information.

After rectifying gaps in our data where we could, we reviewed the inventory in its entirety. Equipped with images and full descriptions of the inventory and trends in visual data, we developed a controlled vocabulary, dividing the patron furniture into four categories: tables, workspace seating, soft seating, and miscellaneous. These divisions helped us identify trends in the history of our purchases.

Investigating Companies

Utilizing the manufacturing data that we collected on the furniture in our libraries, we sought to identify relationships between these manufacturers and prison labor. It is important to note

that many private companies are currently not transparent about their relationship to the PIC. For this reason, it is possible that even if we are unable to identify a connection between the PIC and certain companies, there is still a potential that they are profiting from it (Worth Rises, 2020).

There are several watchdog organizations that research and publish information connecting private companies to the prison industrial complex. We cross-referenced the names of the companies in our data against three lists provided by Worth Rises, Project of the American Friends Services Committee (AFSC), and the Corporate Accountability Lab (CAL) (American Friends Service Committee, n.d.; Worth Rises, 2020; Wu & Brady, 2020a, 2020b). Worth Rises, one of the most valuable datasets, is "dedicated to dismantling the prison industry and ending the exploitation of those it touches" (n.d.). The AFSC is a religious society that works to challenge injustice (2022). The CAL is a group of legal, human rights, and environmental rights activists that seeks to hold corporations accountable (2022). If a name appeared on any of these lists, we followed the evidence cited to better understand the connection to prison labor.

The Worth Rises database was the most comprehensive of all three datasets that we consulted for our research. As a part of its mission to expose worker exploitation, Worth Rises has researched and published a searchable dataset that was updated in 2022 with downloadable data from past versions. We used the 2020 dataset to search for companies that manufactured furniture found in our libraries. This dataset includes companies that have ties to the PIC outside of prison labor, so we made a point to verify the nature of the manufacturer's connection with the PIC (Worth Rises, 2020).

State correctional facilities are more open about their use of prison labor and are not included in the datasets that we consulted. These datasets are limited to private companies because state correctional facilities that utilize prison labor openly share this information on their websites. For example, the Corcraft website states: "Corcraft is the industry program within the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision. We employ incarcerated individuals to produce goods while preparing them for release by teaching them work skills, work ethic and responsibility" (n.d.).

Findings

Preferred Sourcing

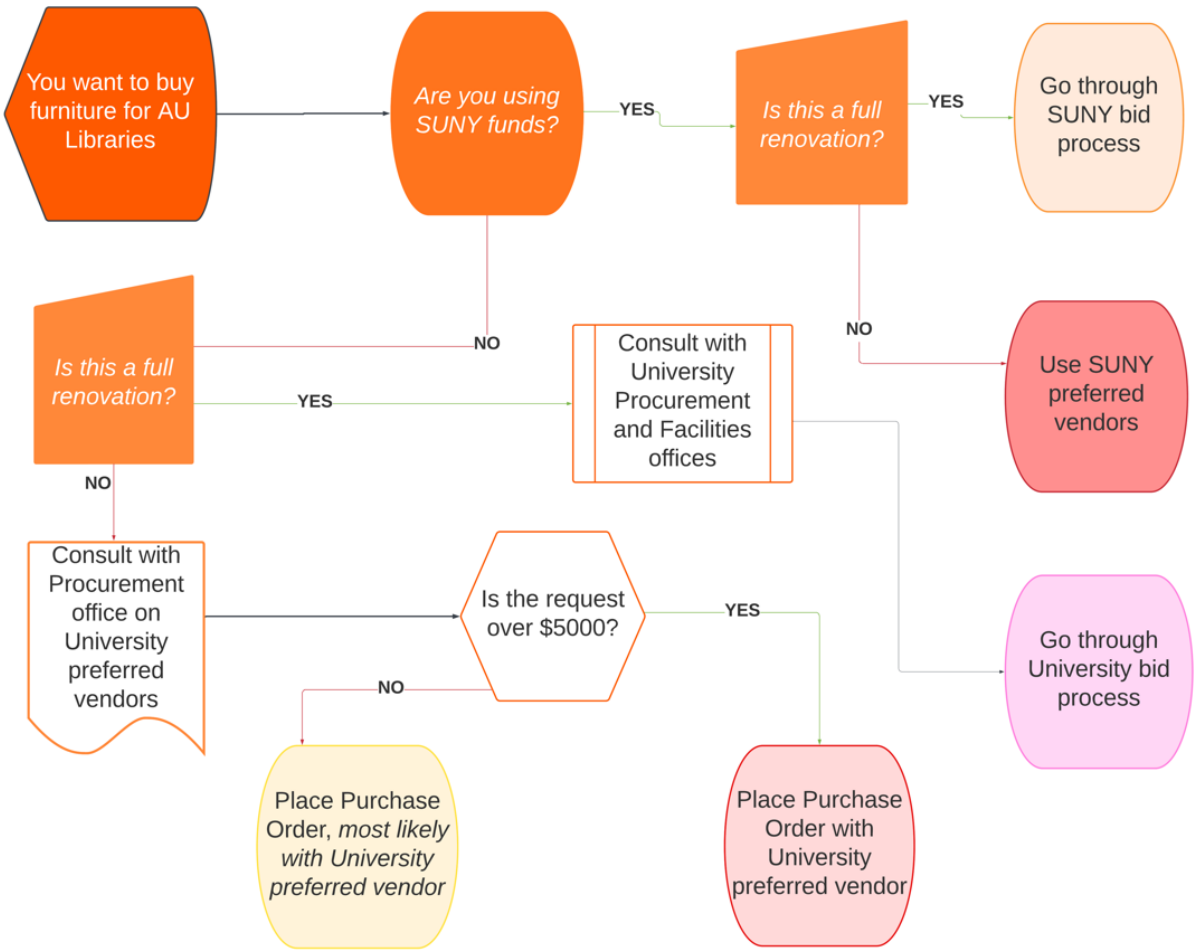
Separate from the furniture inventory, we conducted a related investigation into preferred sourcing and procurement policies at Alfred University. The rationale behind this was that it was insufficient to simply assess the patron furniture items in our buildings, we needed to understand the forces that shaped AU Libraries' decision making on furniture purchases: Alfred University procurement policies and SUNY procurement policies, depending on where funding comes from. Figure 1 is a flowchart depicting the essential steps, including which university departments need to be involved, depending on the funding source and amount.

For private institution funds, AU Libraries follows AU sourcing guidelines (see Figure 1, following the steps for "Are you using SUNY funds? No") (Alfred University, n.d.-a). Alfred University partners with three preferred sources for furniture: Krueger International, Sauder Education, and Intivity (V. Ewald, personal communication April 26, 2022). AU's procurement office revamped its purchasing guidelines circa 2018, stating that at minimum all furniture purchasing decisions involve two to three departments: the requesting department, the procurement office, and potentially AU Facilities, which oversees maintenance of

the physical spaces on campus. The level of involvement of each department corresponds to the project scope and amount spent, with scrutiny increasing as the amount spent increases. For purchases under $1,000, requirements include an official Purchase Order request and conversation with the procurement office (Alfred University, n.d.-b). A larger-scale purchase would include a request for proposal necessitating Procurement's involvement with vendor negotiations. Spending over $50,000, or possible renovations requires the AU Facilities department to become involved and necessitates a bid process (*Bids and Proposals*, n.d.).

For SUNY or state funds, AU is required by law to use New York state preferred sources, (see Figure 1, following the steps for "Are you using SUNY funds? Yes"). New York State finance law and corrections law directs SUNY institutions to consider preferred sources whenever purchases of commodities or services are required (SUNY, n.d.). There are three preferred sources in New York State: Corcraft, New York State Preferred Source Program For People Who Are Blind, and New York State Industries for the Disabled (SUNY, n.d.). Each preferred source has a list of all the commodities and services they offer. For educational and institutional furniture, Corcraft is the main source that offers these items (NYS Office of General Services, 2022).

FIGURE 1
Preferred Sourcing at Alfred University: A Flowchart to Determine Procedures and Standards for Purchasing Furniture for Alfred University Libraries



Furniture Audit

The results of our patron furniture audit (see Table 1 for a full list of the patron furniture audit results) showed 905 pieces of furniture from 28 companies across Scholes and Herrick Memorial Libraries. The largest percentage (47.96%) of furniture came from Krueger International (KI), with 434 pieces of furniture. The remaining top companies are Jasper Chair with 97 pieces (10.72%); Corcraft with 59 pieces (6.52%); Gunlocke with 34 pieces (3.76%); and Nemschoff Chairs, Inc. with 10 pieces (1.1%). We could not identify a manufacturer for a significant parentage (19.67%) of the furniture inventoried, either due to lack of manufacturing label or lack of current records indicating a purchase order with a vendor from the Procurement Office.

TABLE 1
Patron Furniture Audit Results

Company	Number	Percentage
Krueger International (KI)	434	47.96%
Unidentified	178	19.67%
Jasper Chair	97	10.72%
Corcraft	59	6.52%
Gunlocke	34	3.76%
Nemschoff Chairs, Inc.	10	1.10%
Global Industrial	9	0.99%
Spectrum Industries	9	0.99%
Modway	8	0.88%
High Point Furniture Industries	7	0.77%
Winsome Trading, Inc.	7	0.77%
AFL-CIO Local No. 162	6	0.66%
Conway	6	0.66%
LumiSource	6	0.66%
Lesro Industries	5	0.55%
Skyline	5	0.55%
Bevis	4	0.44%
Restaurant Furniture.Net	4	0.44%
Allsteel	3	0.33%
CrossRoads	3	0.33%
Informa by Gaylord	3	0.33%
Anji Qianglong Steel and Plastic Furniture Co.	1	0.11%
Bretford	1	0.11%
Globe/ChairWorld	1	0.11%
HON Company	1	0.11%
Inwood	1	0.11%
Kimball International	1	0.11%
Oklahoma Sound	1	0.11%
Upholsterers International	1	0.11%

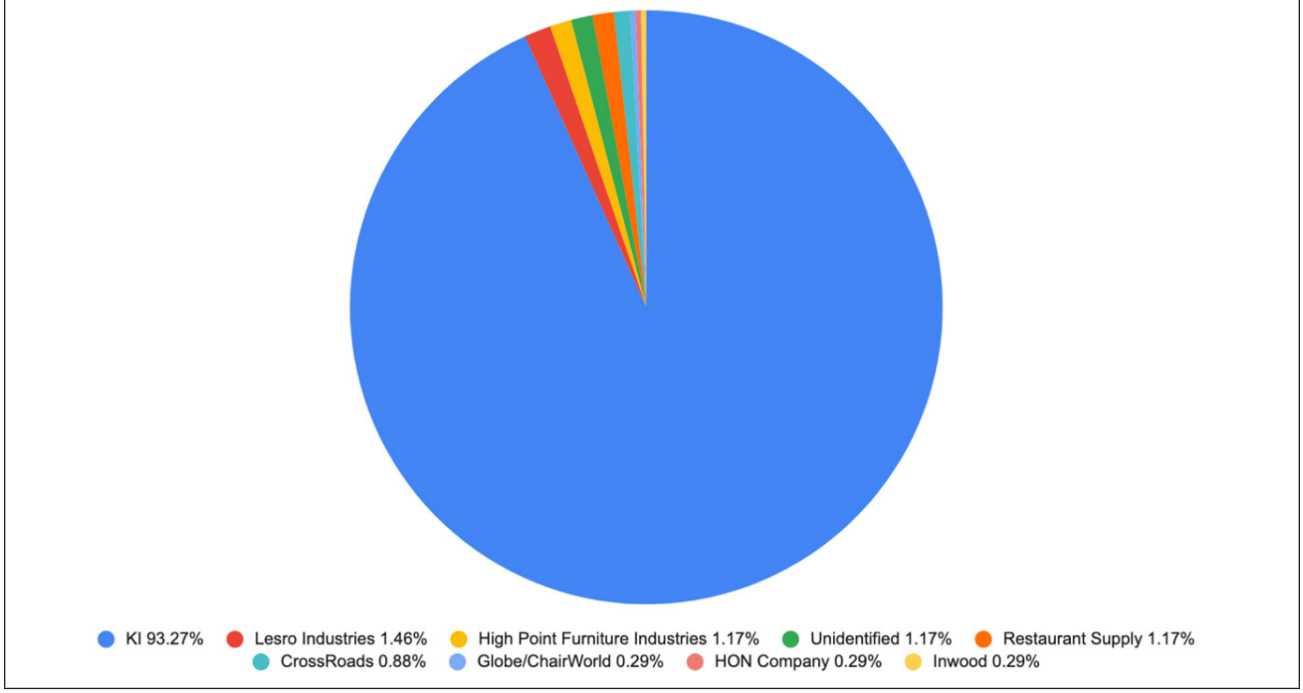
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to label rounding

Analysis

Patterns emerged when the 905 furniture items from 28 manufacturers across two libraries were split according to each building and type of seating (see Figures 2 and 3). Purchases for items from KI and Corcraft follow the procurement policies and preferred sourcing requirements for Alfred University but can also be explained by the context of the purchases. In this section we draw out the implications from these patterns, so that we can take steps toward divesting from the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) in the future. There are instances in which AU Libraries purchases veered from the procurement policies and preferred sources for AU, which we explore as a path forward for future purchases.

When outfitting traditional educational spaces, such as classrooms or computer labs, AU Libraries purchases most often come from KI, a preferred vendor, see Figure 2. The last known large-scale purchases for Herrick Memorial Library happened during a major renovation in the late 2000s, furnished exclusively by KI. This is reflected in the data from our private side library: a majority of furniture—319 of 342 items (93.27%)—comes from KI. These purchases were most likely made following the recommendation of the architect dur-

FIGURE 2
Percentage of Patron Furniture (per company): Herrick Memorial Library

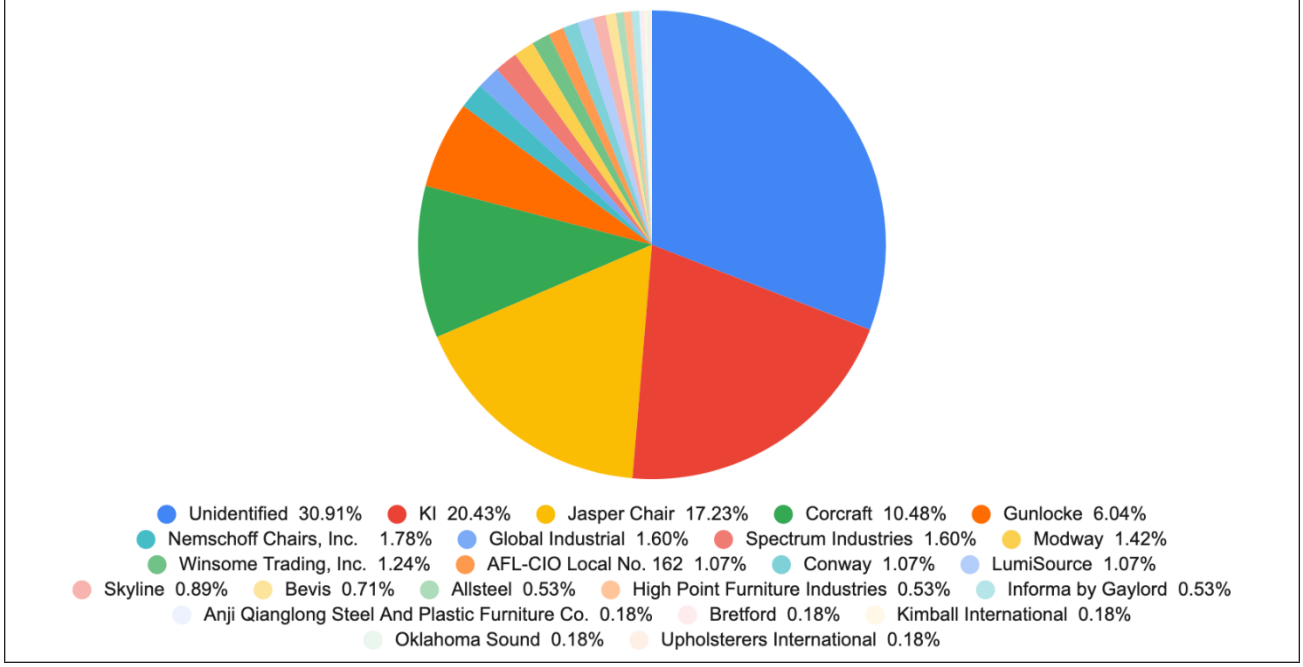


ing the renovation. We are not sure of additional reasoning behind the purchase, but KI is a popular option for libraries due to their variety of products and integration into university procurement systems.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of patron furniture, per company, found in Herrick Memorial Library, which is the library building associated with the private university.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of patron furniture, per company, found in Scholes Library.

FIGURE 3
Percentage of Patron Furniture (per company): Scholes Library



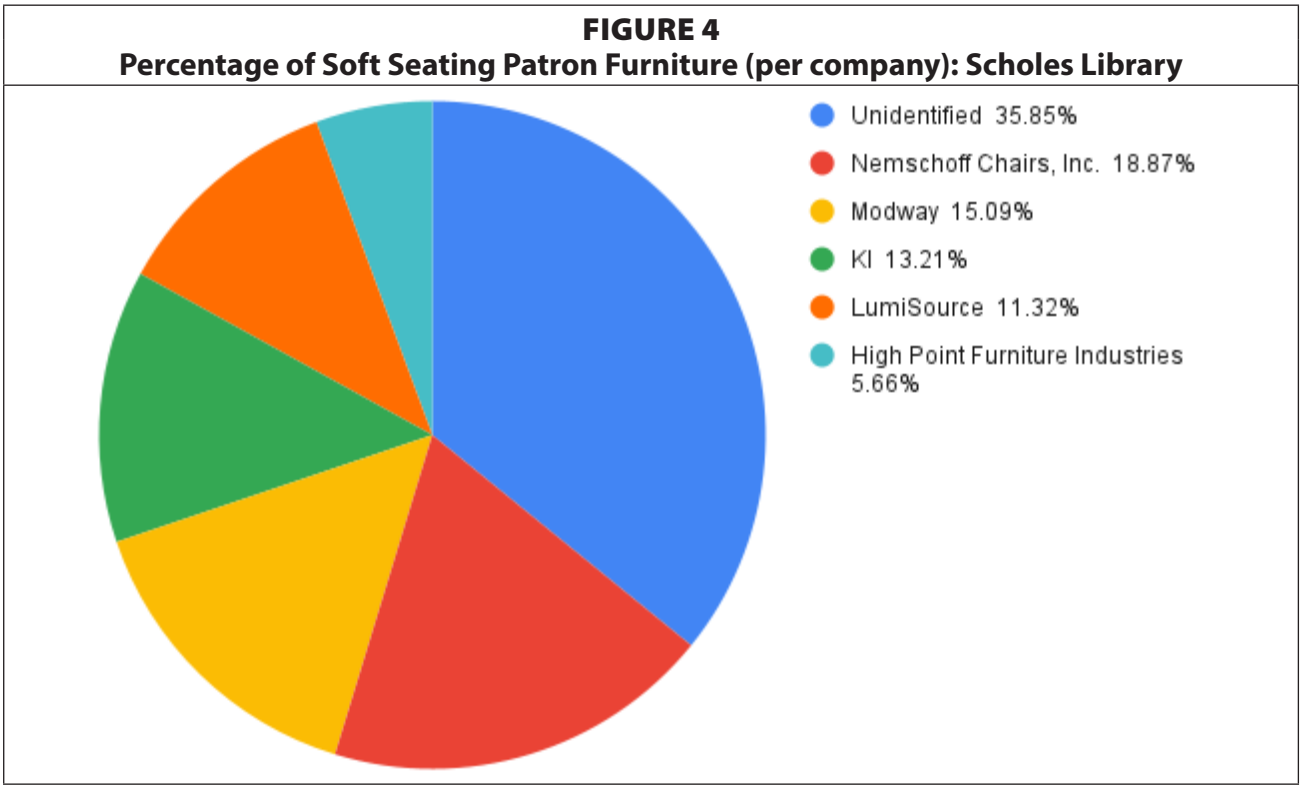
Scholes Library is the library building that serves the New York State College of Ceramics, a State University of New York statutory college hosted by Alfred University.

The data from Scholes Library does not reflect as clear of a picture (see Figure 3). This was surprising, given that in theory, Scholes purchasing should be governed by the stricter New York State guidance when using state funds. Many of the purchases in Scholes do not appear to follow the preferred sources for Alfred University. This indicates that AU Libraries may have more flexibility in purchasing than we originally thought.

To better understand the purchasing patterns at Scholes, we divided the data into furniture type: miscellaneous, soft seating, tables, workspace seating. This shed light on purchasing patterns, specifically both soft and workspace seating (see Figures 4, 5, 6, and 7). Of these, items from LumiSource and Modway were the most recent purchases for Scholes Library in 2017 as part of a Scholes Library furniture and space refresh across multiple floors with a $5,000 budget (M. Romanchock, personal communication, May 27, 2022). AU preferred sources were not used. These non-preferred sources included pub-style seating to refresh a vending machine area into a café-style destination spot; other items included mid-century modern style furniture, floor poufs, and rugs to make another destination reading area adjacent to the art periodical collections. All other soft seating purchases pre-date current record keeping.

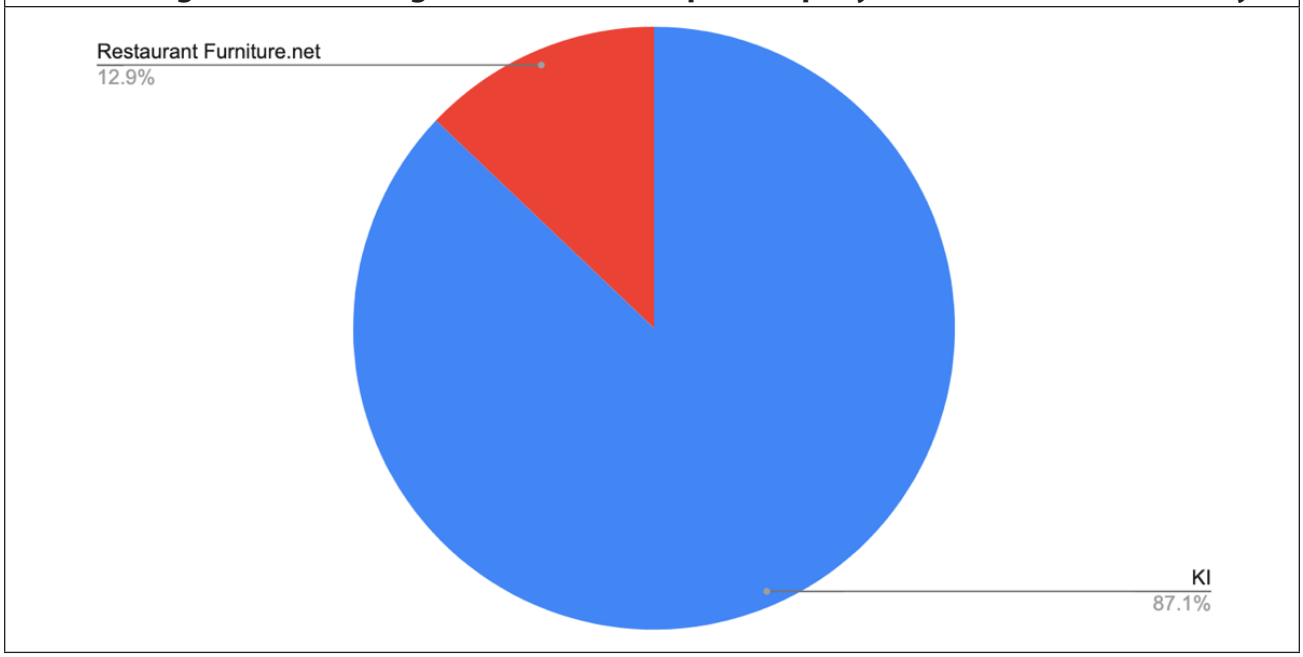
Figure 4 shows the percentage of soft seating patron furniture per companies found in Scholes Library, which is the library building that serves the New York State College of Ceramics, a State University of New York statutory college hosted by Alfred University.

FIGURE 4
Percentage of Soft Seating Patron Furniture (per company): Scholes Library



In Herrick Memorial Library, 41 soft seating furniture items (see Figure 5), came from two manufactures: 37 (87.1%) from KI and 4 (12.9%) from Restaurant Furniture.net. The purchases from KI happened during a large-scale renovation in 2007 and aligned with the AU preferred sourcing protocol.

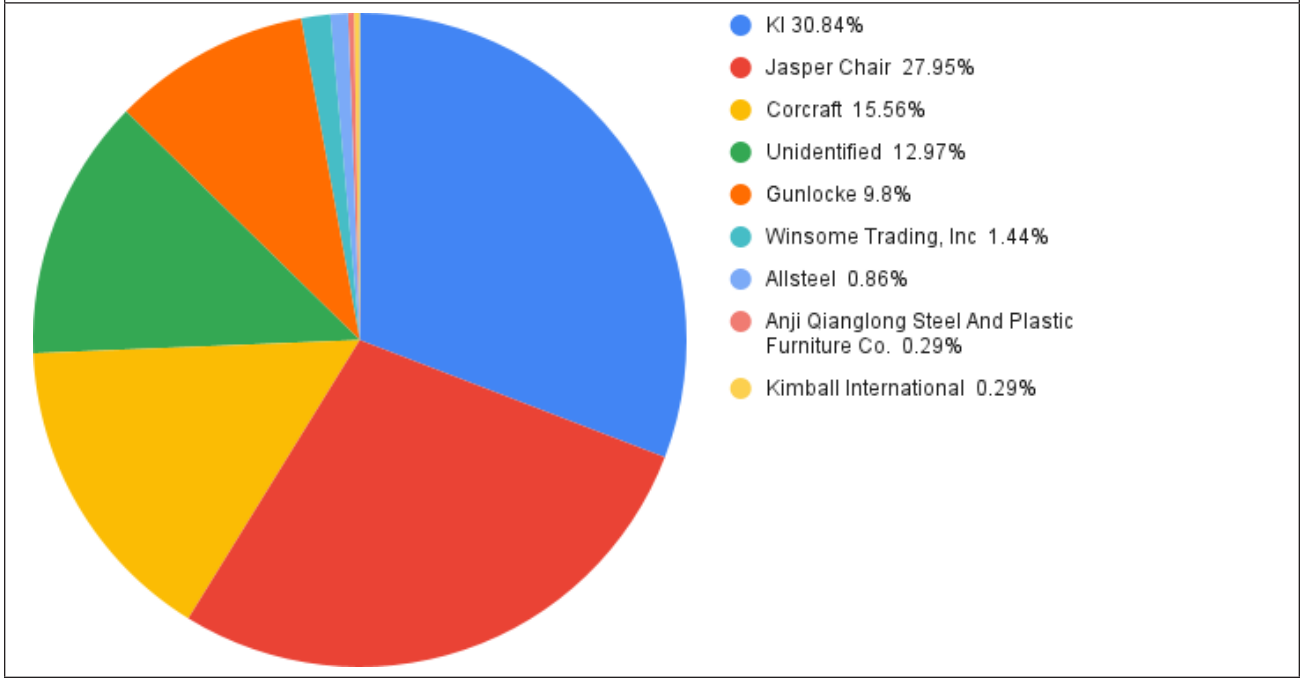
FIGURE 5
Percentage of Soft Seating Patron Furniture (per company): Herrick Memorial Library



However, we continue to see flexibility in vendors with recent purchases. The most recent furniture acquisitions in Herrick Memorial Library are restaurant style booths for a patron lounge area purchased from Restaurant Furniture.net, not one of Alfred University's preferred vendors. This flexibility in purchasing was justified as a part of a unique project to renovate a small space in the building around a theme that was not supported by the preferred vendors (Herrick Library, 2018).

Workspace seating at Scholes Library comes from eight manufacturers which reflect both

FIGURE 6
Percentage of Workspace Seating Patron Furniture (per company): Scholes Library

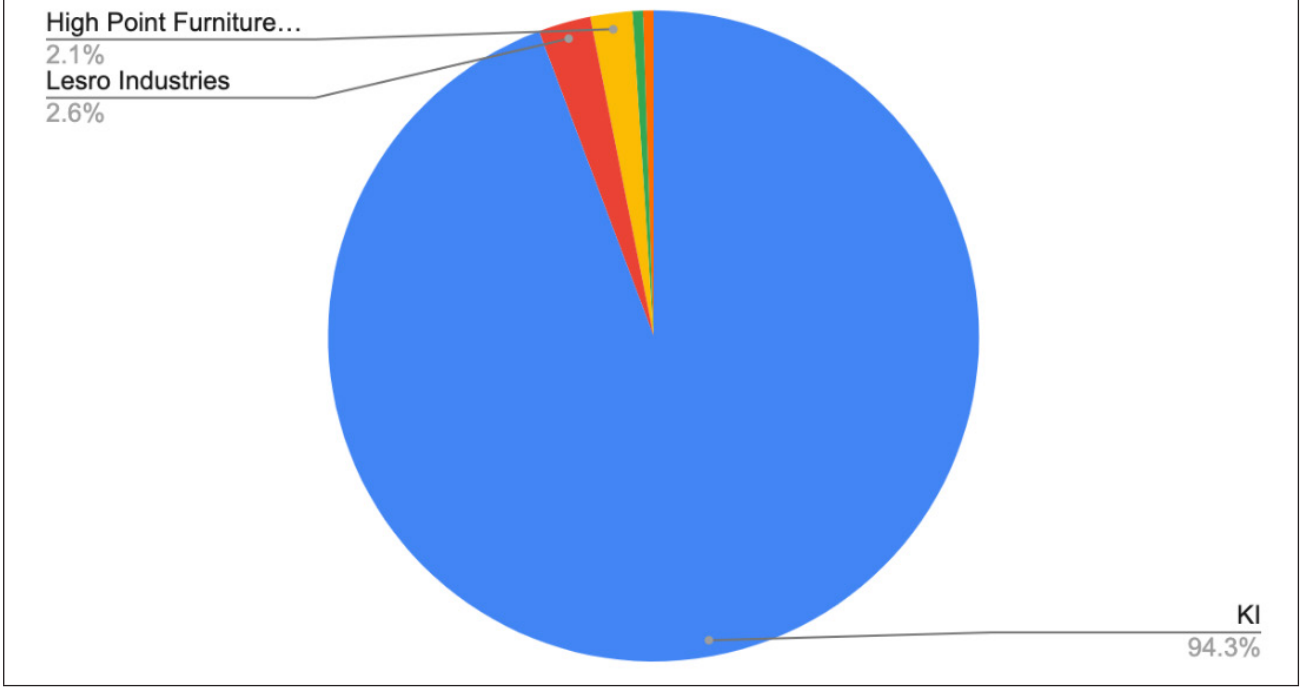


preferred and non-preferred sources (see Figure 6). These reflect similar trends: traditional furniture follows preferred sourcing, while seating with special thematic and design needs veers from procurement policy. KI purchases follow procurement preferred sourcing protocol and reside in more traditional library settings: a library computer lab, an open classroom, and a special collections examination and reading area. Winsome Trading, Inc. purchases were made in 2017 outfitting a cafe-style vending and coffee area as part of a high-top seating area for patrons to use; these purchases deviate from the AU preferred sourcing protocol (M. Romanchock, personal communication, May 27, 2022). These purchases were able to deviate from SUNY regulations because they utilized Alfred University budget funds and met specific design needs.

Figure 6 shows the percentage of workspace seating patron furniture, per company, found in Scholes Library, which is the library building that serves the New York State College of Ceramics, a State University of New York statutory college hosted by Alfred University.

Workspace seating in Herrick Memorial Library (192 total pieces) does not diverge from preferred sources, because the needs for the furniture are not uniquely outside of the vendor's offerings. The furniture comes from five manufacturers, with a majority—181 pieces (94.27%)—coming from KI (see Figure 7). The remaining companies are from preferred sources or likely came from offices: Lesro Industries had five pieces (2.6%); High Point Furniture had four pieces (2.08%); HON Company had one piece (0.52%); and Globe/ChairWorld had one piece (0.52%). As with its soft seating, Herrick Memorial Library acquired most of its workspace seating en masse during a renovation of the facilities in 2007. This furniture comes entirely from KI, a university preferred vendor. There have been no recent workspace seating purchases for Herrick Memorial Library.

FIGURE 7
Percentage of Workspace Seating Patron Furniture (per company): Herrick Memorial



Implications

Renovation and large-scale purchases at Alfred University have significant oversight and need to fit within existing procurement policies. Furnishing decisions may be tasked to a project manager, architectural firm, or outside actor who is not a library worker. One vendor may become a renovation's sole furniture source due to a bid process. Without active participation from the library during the renovation process, ethical ramifications of furniture decisions may not be interrogated, and it could be easy to purchase furniture from a company connected to prison labor.

Smaller scale initiatives in budget and scope allow for more flexibility. An initiative calling for furniture that functions differently than a traditional classroom or workspace is particularly malleable; these initiatives may require unique offerings that cannot be supported by preferred vendors. Alfred University Libraries emphasizes a welcoming, open space that prioritizes students. Prioritizing the student experience in themed seating such as the Scholes Café and Herrick Library's Saxon Station allowed for purchasing from non-preferred vendors in 2017 and 2018; in 2023, prioritizing the student experience allowed for outfitting themed individual student study rooms in an underutilized area of Scholes. Furniture that stands out and attracts students is a compelling component in creating a campus destination spot. Data and gate counts that demonstrate increased usage for areas outfitted with non-preferred vendor furniture can help support future requests.

Companies Connected to Prison Labor

We identified two companies that we had purchased from with connections to prison labor: Corcraft and KI. The nature of these connections is quite different and should not be conflated.

Corcraft

"Corcraft is the 'brand name' for the Division of Correctional Industries, an entity within the NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision" (Corcraft, n.d.). We can say with confidence that the furniture manufactured by Corcraft was created by people working while incarcerated. Additional services that Corcraft provides, which fall outside of the scope of our audit, but our libraries could have benefited from in the past include dangerous labor such as asbestos removal (*Corcraft Purchases—CUNY / SUNY*, n.d.; Fisher, n.d.).

Krueger International (KI)

KI's relationship to prison labor is less clear cut. KI appears on the Worth Rises dataset with an indication that the company has ties to prison labor. The evidence listed in the Worth Rises data directs to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) (Worth Rises, 2020). The TDCJ's publicly available records indicate that they spent over $34 million with KI between 2015 and 2022, primarily on what are coded as raw materials, rather than on furniture, what KI is known for selling (Texas Comptroller, n.d.).* However, this does not paint the full picture.

To clarify the relationship between KI and prison labor, we had to look to one of its subsidiaries, Original Equipment Industries (OEI). OEI is a subsidiary of KI that was, according to their website, established specifically with correctional industries in mind (Original Equipment

* To navigate to the TDCJ spending, using the Data Visualization page, select payments to Payee, and under agency select Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

Industries, n.d.). OEI is also a member of the National Correctional Industries Association (NCIA). The NCIA defines correctional industries as programs that utilize prison labor or, in its words, that "provide real-world work experience and training to incarcerated individuals to prepare them for successful reentry and employment after release" (n.d.). OEI advertises in different correctional industries publications, consistently using similar language: "OEI is a leader in bringing you quality parts, a dedicated sales team and turnkey support services that are a step above the rest" (2021). It is unclear if OEI sells prison-made furniture, but it appears that they provide corrections industries with all the tools necessary to start their own prison labor outfits. KI's connection to the PIC via OEI, is sufficient for AU Libraries to purchase elsewhere.

Actions Taken

The results of the furniture audit inspired two types of actions: raising awareness and changing AU Libraries' purchasing considerations. Our initial steps toward raising awareness focused outside our institution, within the broader context of librarianship.

The entirety of this research has direct implications for libraries within the State University of New York system and are governed by New York State laws for preferred sourcing. Our first step in conveying this information was to present at the State University of New York Library Association (SUNYLA) conference in 2022 (Adams & Planansky, 2022a). This presentation inspired conversations which led to other presentations and poster sessions with the Medical Library Association, Metropolitan New York Library Council, and ACRL (Adams & Planansky, 2022b, 2022c, 2023). Foundational to these presentations, poster session, and conversations have been building connections with others that are interested in divesting from the PIC.

Our work is inspired by other abolitionist library groups, like the Abolitionist Library Association (ABLA) and the Prison Library Support Network (PLSN) (Abolitionist Library Association, n.d.; plsn-nyc, n.d.). As a part of our awareness building project, we sought to connect others with these groups. While we hope that attendees have taken the information back to their institutions, some of the most meaningful and action-driven conversations that have come from this awareness building happened with other librarians who were already involved with organizing toward abolition, like ABLA and PLSN.

In partnership with the AU Libraries Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression working group, we have begun exploring developing an ethical purchasing policy that would address forced labor and the PIC, and other forms of ethical purchasing. Attempting to provide guidance for an institution to make ethical purchasing decisions under capitalism is an unwieldy project, which is still being formulated. In the meantime, the libraries have taken direct, albeit informal, action to cease, where possible, purchasing from KI and Corcraft.

Without a library purchasing policy in place, the AU Libraries Administration was able to implement changes in its purchasing practices. Both the AU Libraries Dean and Director have stayed abreast of our research and seen our research presented at multiple conferences. The Director of Libraries, who oversees purchasing library furniture, added addressing forced labor as an important part of the purchasing workflow. In a recent set of purchases, made in the year following the patron furniture inventory, to update the furniture in an open classroom, the director did some background research on the company we were purchasing from, Sauder Education, to ensure that the company did not have ties to the PIC. Additionally, the

director has taken steps to encourage library staff and faculty to purchase furniture from providers other than KI. Next steps will include raising awareness across Alfred University and pointing toward the actions taken by the libraries as examples for how to divest from the PIC across campus.

Conclusion

Following the discovery that AU Libraries housed furniture connected to the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC), our furniture audit identified the extent to which our library has ties to the PIC by purchasing from Krueger International (KI) and Corcraft. The investigation yielded a deeper understanding of the history, policies, and laws which fostered these connections. Our discovery that AU Libraries purchased much of its current furniture from KI during a renovation has implications for libraries making large furniture purchases or undergoing renovations. Large-scale purchases and rehab projects are ideal times to look closely at the vendors and their connections. Navigating state laws that require purchasing materials made in state correctional facilities is more complicated. By understanding our institution's procurement policies and practices we identified nuances in their application that will be important for how we proceed with future purchasing.

While we are seeking ways to divest from the PIC in our library, we understand that these steps will not immediately lead to changing conditions for people working in prisons. Vital to the conversation about divestment are the voices of people who are incarcerated. In the preliminary study, *The Work and Us* Wilson et al. share the perspective of incarcerated workers; according to Tommy, an incarcerated person, legislation in Colorado that ended involuntary servitude in 2018 "has had no effect on anything here. No pay rate changes, but prices for canteen and hygiene products and phone time fees have been raised again at least three times in 2022" (2023). For librarians or libraries looking for a more direct impact on the lives of incarcerated people, we recommend becoming directly involved with abolitionist groups such as Abolitionist Library Association (ABLA) and the Prison Library Support Network (PLSN) (Abolitionist Library Association, n.d.; plsn-nyc, n.d.). Within our institution, we hope to build toward divesting from the prison industrial complex entirely, with prison labor as a starting point.

For libraries that are interested in divesting from prison labor, librarians can use this research to begin exploring their state and institutional preferred sourcing requirements, evaluating their own library furniture, exploiting flexibility in current policies, and developing their own purchasing policies that call for divestment.

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