

# INSIGHT

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES | FALL 2024



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# Spartan Project SEARCH brings internship opportunities for young adults with disabilities to MSU Libraries

Spartan Project SEARCH is an initiative that Michigan State University Libraries Accessibility Coordinator Heidi Schroeder has been interested in implementing since she first heard about the College of Nursing's involvement in 2018. Schroeder, who became Accessibility Coordinator & Library Liaison to MSU's Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities in 2015, has been at the Libraries since 2007, previously holding the roles of Science Collections Coordinator and Health Sciences Librarian/ Nursing Library Liaison. After hearing about the internship program from her nursing colleagues, Schroeder brought the proposal to MSU Libraries administration in 2019, but the project did not progress, in part due to the pandemic. Now, in Fall 2024, MSU Libraries is entering its third year of acting as a host site for the Spartan Project SEARCH.



Heidi Schroeder  
Accessibility Coordinator &  
Library Liaison to MSU's  
Resource Center for Persons  
with Disabilities

at 13 internship sites across campus. The student experience is designed to be multifaceted, with the Ingham Intermediate School District providing classroom instruction to students alongside year-long internships at MSU. Spartan Project SEARCH interns rotate in 10-week increments through the participating

interns work with library staff from various library units to develop and grow their skills and confidence."

The campus branch of the initiative is supported by the Spartan Project SEARCH Steering Committee, which provides strategic direction, development and oversight for the program. It comprises a number

of MSU representatives, including Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities Ability Specialist Lindsay Hill, who reached out to Schroeder in summer 2022 to learn if the Libraries was interested in being a host site. Schroeder then connected with Brooke Locher, Spartan Project SEARCH Instructor at Ingham ISD, to coordinate bringing the Libraries into the Spartan Project SEARCH program. Locher, who is on her 13th year teaching special education, said she was initially drawn to the Spartan

Project SEARCH position at Ingham ISD because of its emphasis on teaching life skills and independence.

"A special education colleague had told me about this program that helps young adults with disabilities and prepares them for work," Locher said. "I originally taught in an elementary school ASD [autism spectrum disorders] classroom, and while I was there we were really working on life skills and that independence piece, which didn't always fit with the curriculum. I saw a job opening for a Spartan Project SEARCH position with Ingham ISD, and now I'm in my sixth year of being able to help



Zoë McLaughlin  
South/Southeast Asian Studies  
& Accessibility Librarian

host units on campus in line with the Ingham Intermediate School District (ISD) academic year.

The MSU Libraries became a host site in Fall 2022, with two interns in each of the 2022–23 and 2023–24 academic years. Schroeder and South/Southeast Asian Studies & Accessibility Librarian Zoë McLaughlin are the primary Spartan Project SEARCH intern supervisors at the MSU Libraries. Schroeder said that she's especially enjoyed seeing the interns work with Libraries staff. "The MSU Libraries is thrilled to host Project SEARCH interns," she said. "It has been wonderful to see the

An extension of the international Project SEARCH program, Spartan Project SEARCH is one of 16 program sites in Michigan. The Spartan Project SEARCH initiative started in Fall 2016 as a partnership between MSU, Ingham Intermediate School District, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Michigan Rehabilitation Services, Community Mental Health and Peckham, Inc. The program "brings a successful international program for young adults with developmental disabilities to the campus of Michigan State University," providing opportunities



our interns transition to more of that adult independence, and helping them find the skills and the drive to have that independence and a fulfilling life.”

While the Spartan Project SEARCH program at Ingham ISD serves all of the 12 local districts in Ingham County, Locher noted that Eaton County and Clinton County have sent students from their districts to participate as well. In Michigan, adult learners with disabilities can be enrolled in public education from age 18 to 26. This age range is different from most states, where students with disabilities only receive federal special education services until they are 21 or 22. Locher said that while the age of her students spans 18–26, most of her students average between the ages of 21 and 23. She also provided insight on how Spartan Project SEARCH became affiliated with the University, and specifically with the MSU College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR) as the host department.

“We were thinking about larger groups on campus, and being a land-grant university, the College of Ag seemed ideal. An extra piece is that my dad works there, and is actually our business liaison. So I kind of pulled the, hey, would you like to help host us? And he was like, besides you being my daughter, I really love the idea of this program and the benefits that it brings.”

As the Assistant to the Director for Field Operations and Infrastructure in MSU AgBioResearch in CANR, Ben Darling supports the Spartan Project SEARCH program as business liaison by helping provide access around campus, including making connections for other potential MSU internships. Darling said he has been at MSU since he began mowing grass as a ninth grader for what was then the Crop & Soil Science Turf Program. His father, Bary Darling, was the university farms manager at MSU for more than 40 years. Ben Darling has officially been with AgBioResearch for 25 years and helped establish CANR as the host department for Spartan Project SEARCH.

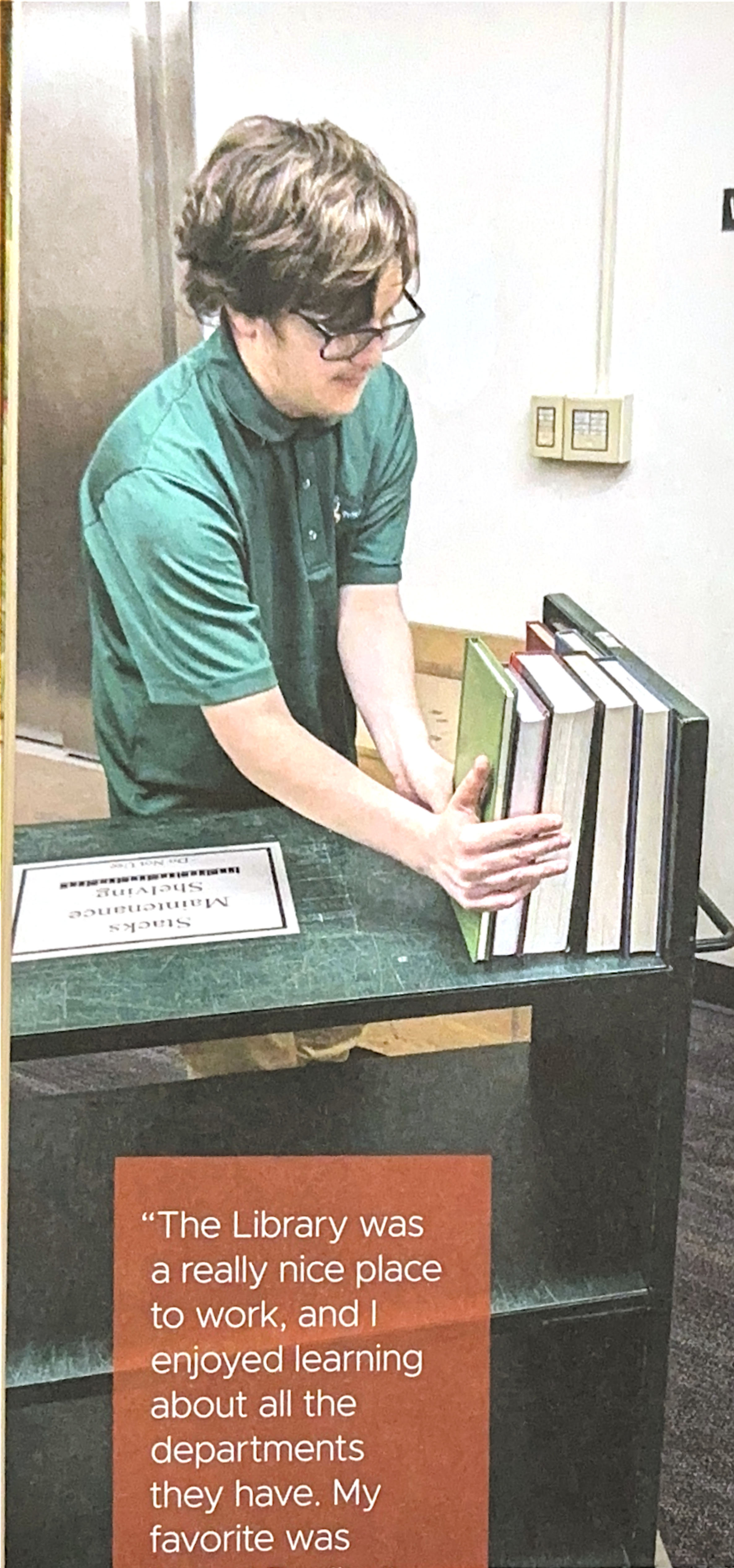


“Everyone at the Library was so nice. I really enjoyed the comic book department.”

— Emily M.

2022–2023 Project SEARCH cohort





“The Library was a really nice place to work, and I enjoyed learning about all the departments they have. My favorite was Virtual Reality.”

— Wesley C.

2023–2024 Project SEARCH cohort

W “Bringing these Ingham ISD students to MSU through this program really highlights the communal aspect of Spartan Project SEARCH,” Darling said. “We are very lucky that these young adults can come to a place that really has everything. I mean, if you wanted to haul manure or work with cats or work in a library, it’s all here. And for me, the plus of all this is that, while we can offer these great opportunities, we really get back more than what we give. If you are a unit that has an intern working with you, you know that feeling of pride, that happiness, that joy, that comes when you have been working with that student and seeing them complete the internship. It’s not only eye-opening, but it can also be a life-changing experience. That’s why it’s a communal program — everybody is benefiting.”

Many of the internships that students receive are designed to help interns learn both hard and soft skills that will easily translate into competitive and integrated employment. These have included jobs related to facilities, dining, customer service and more, Locher said, but “all help provide experiences for interns to explore and really decide what type of work they would like to pursue — that is, help them to be able to find their niche.” In always looking to expand internship possibilities, she wanted to also provide students with opportunities that would challenge them to learn about organizational structures that might feel unfamiliar or offer more independence. The MSU Libraries, Locher said, was a natural consideration.

“One of the goals of Spartan Project SEARCH is not only fully immersing the interns in the program, but also giving them those opportunities that they might not otherwise be able to experience,” she said. “I really wanted to provide a professional environment for interns to work on the higher-level skills to contrast the customer service and custodial fields that are not necessarily as environmentally strict. I want interns to learn there are jobs with some of that structure, and to have a chance to learn if they can manage those things. MSU Libraries became an option to allow interns to explore this structure and differing job options, and I was lucky to begin working closely with Heidi to develop this opportunity.”

Since connecting with Schroeder over two years ago, Spartan Project SEARCH students have been able to intern in units across the MSU Libraries, including Accessibility, Circulation, Publishing Services and Facilities. Schroeder said that job responsibilities in these roles range from scanning course materials to producing miniature Spartan notebooks, as well as duties related to book check-in and drop-off, stacks maintenance like book collecting, and furniture setup, which is especially welcome, she noted, during finals week. Schroeder also emphasized the program’s mission of teaching independence. “While



Zoë and I, along with unit supervisors, train the interns initially, the goal is always to have the interns do the tasks of the various units independently,” she said.

McLaughlin, who also works closely with the interns as a secondary supervisor, cited the help of one of the recent interns in installing the “Advancing Accessibility” exhibit on 2-West last spring.

“While the interns have different sites in the Main Library where

they work consistently, we also have some smaller short-term projects slotted into their internships that might extend beyond their unit rotations within the Libraries,” McLaughlin said. “One of the interns last spring helped install and take down the “Advancing Accessibility” exhibit, and he also assisted me with pop-up exhibits by pulling books to display. Having him select eye-catching covers to display, for example, was super helpful.”

Chandlee Marcyk-Taylor works as a Library Assistant in the Course Materials Program and has helped host several rotations of interns at the MSU Libraries. “Over the past several years, Spartan Project SEARCH interns have made invaluable contributions to the Controlled Digital Lending program, which has made our collections more accessible to students in classes that otherwise would rely on print reserves,” Marcyk-Taylor said. “In return, we endeavor to provide a supportive and welcoming introduction to an office environment, which we hope gives them an idea of

whether they’d like to pursue similar work in the future.”

Schroeder noted that one of her priorities in hosting Spartan Project SEARCH students at the MSU Libraries was to provide a multifaceted internship to ensure they were coming away with a wider range of experience.

“Initially, Zoë and I were envisioning specific projects for the interns, but we soon realized that we would have to tailor tasks to

interns’ needs and goals,” Schroeder said. “We wanted our interns to gain a broad perspective of the Libraries, so we started setting up short tours of various units in the Libraries so they could see all the different things we do. They tour the Digital Scholarship Lab where they can try Virtual Reality if they want, the Makerspace, and the Digital Multimedia Center. They visit Special Collections and University Archives and Historical Collections, where staff retrieve and showcase materials based on the interns’ interests. This year, we added a visit to the Conservation & Preservation Unit, which was a really cool tour for them to experience. We also spend time introducing interns to the Accessibility Unit and getting to know them.”

Locher noted that this focus on independence, in addition to Schroeder’s passion for the program, showcases the impact of the Libraries as a hosting unit in Spartan Project SEARCH.

“I really enjoyed working at the Library because of all the great people there. They helped me learn many new things.”

Chelsea R. 2023–2024 Project SEARCH cohort





“Heidi is one of the most enthusiastic supervisors I have,” Locher said. “She is all into the program, always trying to brainstorm new ideas. We always go in and we’re like, we can help you find jobs and she’s like, no, I got this, we’re going to do this today and this project tomorrow, and this the next day. Heidi helps create a realistic example of what being employed would look like for our interns. They learn the process of not relying on school staff, but instead how to turn to their co-workers and supervisors for training and questions. Another amazing aspect is that as a supervisor, Heidi interacts with the interns in a kind and accepting way, but she also has high expectations. She creates an environment where interns can feel safe to learn and willing to be pushed to try new and harder job tasks. She is very much like, I’m going to help and guide you with this, but then I’m going to also expect this and leave you to be independent because that’s what we would need with the job. Zoë is a great support there as well — they are always finding opportunities and helping give interns those experiences of learning about new things while they’re on the job.”

As with many internships, interns receive feedback from their supervisors at the end of their 10-week rotations. This is an important piece of the program, Locher said, because it simulates a real-life situation interns might encounter as paid employees.

“Learning jobs at the Library was hard for me but Heidi and Zoë helped me a lot. I enjoyed learning to do new things.”

— Lauren H. 2022–2023 Project SEARCH cohort

“We think it is really important in Project Search that feedback comes from the direct supervisor not only because of the real-life simulation, but also because it helps the supervisor as the employer know what to expect,” Locher said. “Heidi is one of the best in her reviews for employment planning. She outlines all the positives, and she outlines all the things that interns need to work on, but always in a very respectful way. She holds them really to what the business would need, which is what we want from a supervisor. All of the interns I’ve had, even some who found it a more challenging internship, have loved working at MSU Libraries, loved working with Heidi and her team. The interns have all come away with increased independence, but especially in those soft skills like time management and interacting with people and even understanding body language. They have learned all that stuff from being at the MSU Libraries.”

For more information on Spartan Project SEARCH, please visit the program page at <https://www.canr.msu.edu/spartanprojectsearch>. For more information about the MSU Libraries Accessibility Unit, please reach out to Accessibility Coordinator Heidi Schroeder at [hschroed@msu.edu](mailto:hschroed@msu.edu) or visit <https://lib.msu.edu/accessibility>. 📍



Project | SEARCH®

**46,879**

Participants  
Since 2010

**769**

Sites Worldwide

**48**

U.S. States

**10**

Countries

**67**

Spartan Project  
SEARCH Participants  
Since 2016

**31**

Spartan Project  
SEARCH Participants  
Hired on Campus Since  
2016

Source: <https://www.projectsearch.us/>